

**CITY COUNCIL
AND
PLANNING & ZONING
COMMISSION**



JOINT WORKSHOP AGENDA

June 10, 2026

5:30 PM

202 Railroad Avenue Rifle, CO 81650

5:30 PM - Appetizers & Vision Alignment Discussion

- a. Form-Based Code Discussion

6:00 PM - Workshop Meeting

- a. Comprehensive Plan Reconfirmation Discussion with SE Group

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Agenda Item #a.

Agenda Item Name:

Form-Based Code Discussion

Presenter:

Rick Steffen

Item Description:

Form-Based Code Discussion

Recommended Action:

No Action - Discussion Only.

Fiscal Impact:

Discussion Only

Operational Impact:

Discussion Only

Prior Board Motions:

N/A

Background Information:

Planning & Zoning Commission member Rick Steffen provided information on 06/09/2026 to be shared with Council and P&Z Commission Members.

Executive Summary:

The briefing provides context on Form Based Code, how it relates to the Comprehensive Plan reconfirmation process, and the Future Land Use Map.

Notification Requirements:

N/A

Prepared By:

Alexis Ramirez, City Clerk

Attachments:

1. Rifle_FBC_Council_Briefing_June10_2

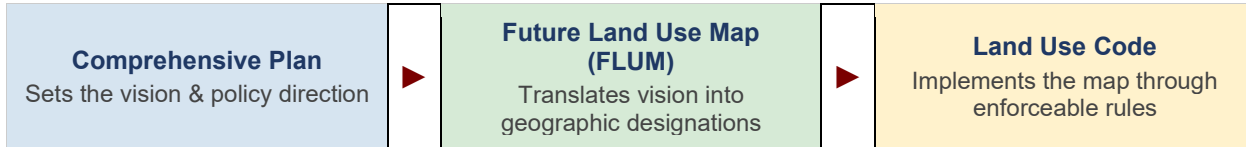
Understanding Form Based Code

A Briefing for City Council & Planning Commission

City of Rifle, Colorado | June 10, 2026

The Chain That Connects Tonight’s Meeting to Future Regulation

Before discussing Form Based Code, it is important to understand how the Comprehensive Plan, the Future Land Use Map, and the land use code relate to each other. These three documents form a chain. Each one depends on and constrains the one that follows.



Tonight’s meeting is focused on the Comprehensive Plan Reconfirmation. But embedded within that reconfirmation is a new Future Land Use Map. The structure and categories of that map are not a neutral technical decision , they determine which type of land use code can implement them. This is the connection that deserves explicit discussion before the August 15 draft is finalized.

What the 2019 Comprehensive Plan’s FLUM Looks Like Today

Rifle’s existing Future Land Use Map , adopted as part of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan , uses conventional land use categories that correspond directly to the City’s current zone districts. The residential designations include:

- High Density Residential
- Moderate Density Residential
- Suburban Residential
- Rural Residential

The commercial and industrial designations include:

- Neighborhood Commercial
- Community Commercial
- Regional Commercial
- Light Industrial
- Industrial

These categories work with Rifle’s current zoning code because they were designed for it. A property designated “Community Commercial” on the FLUM can be evaluated against the Community Commercial zone district standards. The map and the code speak the same language.

Why This Matters:

The 2019 FLUM was built for conventional zoning. If the reconfirmed FLUM is rebuilt using different categories , specifically Form Based Code transect categories , it will no longer be compatible with the existing code. The map and the code will speak different languages, and a full code replacement becomes not just desirable but practically unavoidable.

What Form Based Code Is and How It Changes the FLUM

How Rifle’s Current Zoning Works

Rifle’s existing code is a conventional zoning system. It organizes land into use-based districts and within each district specifies what activities are allowed, minimum lot sizes and setbacks, maximum building heights, and parking minimums. The primary organizing question is: what happens inside the building?

What Form Based Code Does Differently

Form Based Code reorganizes land regulation around physical form rather than use. The primary question becomes: what should this place look and feel like? FBC uses a “transect” , a spectrum from rural to urban , to define character zones:

- T1 , Natural (open land, no development)
- T2 , Rural (agricultural, very low density)
- T3 , Sub-Urban (residential neighborhoods, large lots)
- T4 , General Urban (mixed neighborhoods, moderate density)
- T5 , Urban Center (active mixed-use, storefronts, walkable)
- T6 , Urban Core (highest intensity, downtown)

Within each transect zone, the code specifies build-to lines, frontage types, building heights, and massing standards. Uses become secondary , many uses are permitted across zones with few prohibitions.

The Key Difference in Plain Language:

Conventional zoning asks: “What goes here?” Form Based Code asks: “What should this place feel like?” Both can allow a coffee shop downtown , but FBC also prescribes exactly where the door must face, how far the building sits from the sidewalk, and what the windows must look like. Conventional code generally does not.

How FBC Changes the Future Land Use Map

A FBC-compatible FLUM replaces conventional categories like “Community Commercial” with transect-based designations like “Urban Center” or “General Urban.” These categories do not map onto Rifle’s current zone districts. They require a new code structure to implement them.

This is the critical linkage: the moment the FLUM is drafted in FBC transect language, the following consequences are effectively set in motion:

- The existing zone districts **cannot implement the new map**. A full code replacement becomes functionally necessary.
- Future land use decisions must be evaluated against transect categories **that have no equivalent in current Rifle code**.
- Reversing course **requires reopening the Comprehensive Plan** , a lengthy, costly public process.
- Developers and property owners begin making investment decisions **based on FBC expectations before the code is adopted**.

The FLUM is not a neutral document. Its category structure is a policy decision, and it is a decision that should be made explicitly by Council and the Commission , not embedded quietly in a consultant’s draft.

Weighing Form Based Code for a City of Rifle’s Size

POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES	POTENTIAL CONCERNS FOR RIFLE
Produces more consistent streetscapes and walkable environments in areas like Downtown and Centennial Pkwy , goals already identified in the 2019 plan.	Requires planners with specialized FBC expertise to administer. Rifle’s planning department is small.
Reduces use-by-use battles at the Planning Commission , more predictability for developers who meet form standards.	Full FBC adoption for a community Rifle’s size typically costs \$400,000,\$800,000+ in consultant and staff time.
Supports the housing diversity goals identified in stakeholder engagement: ADUs, cottage courts, townhomes, and smaller-lot homes are easier to permit by right.	Colorado’s land use statutes were written for conventional zoning. FBC-based decisions face a less settled legal framework.
Aligns with what residents say they want: walkability, varied housing, and active streetscapes.	FBC’s benefits are strongest under high, consistent development pressure. Rifle’s development pace is moderate.
Can consolidate multiple overlays and special districts into a cleaner, more readable code over time.	Very few Colorado communities of 10,000,15,000 people have implemented full system-wide FBC successfully.
Better suited for mixed-use and transit-oriented development , relevant if RFTA transit expansion reaches Rifle.	Consistent FBC administration requires trained, stable staff. Turnover in a small department creates ongoing vulnerability.

The Colorado Context: Are There Comparable Examples?

Form Based Code has been adopted in Colorado, but primarily in larger cities or in specific districts within them , not city-wide in communities of Rifle’s size. Relevant nearby examples include:

- Glenwood Springs , form-based elements in the downtown zone, but with significantly higher development pressure, stronger tourism economy, and more staff capacity than Rifle.
- Salida , hybrid approach with form-based principles applied to the downtown core only, not city-wide replacement of the conventional code.
- Buena Vista , limited form-based elements as a hybrid, not a wholesale code replacement.

There is no clear Colorado example of a community of 10,000,15,000 people that has adopted full, system-wide FBC and can be cited as a straightforward success. This does not disqualify FBC for Rifle , but it means the case for it should be made explicitly and evaluated honestly, not assumed.

A Practical Middle Path: Targeted Form Standards

The choice is not strictly “full FBC system-wide” or “status quo.” A targeted hybrid approach is used successfully by many communities and is worth serious consideration for Rifle:

- Keep a conventional base code for the majority of Rifle’s land area , existing residential neighborhoods, industrial areas, and rural fringe. The 2019 FLUM categories largely work for these areas already.
- Apply form-based overlay standards in specific districts where character and streetscape consistency matter most: Downtown, the Centennial Parkway corridor, and potentially South Rifle if it develops as a walkable mixed-use area.
- Add by-right housing diversity standards , ADUs, cottage courts, townhomes, smaller lots , to the base code without requiring full FBC system-wide.

Critically, a hybrid approach keeps the 2019 FLUM’s conventional categories largely intact for most of the city, with form-based overlay areas added where needed. This means the FLUM and the code continue to speak the same language for most of Rifle’s land area, while capturing FBC’s benefits in the districts that would most benefit from them.

This approach is less expensive, easier to administer with existing staff, legally more straightforward to defend, and preserves the City’s flexibility to pursue full FBC in the future if Rifle grows and staff capacity allows.

Questions for Tonight’s Discussion

Given the direct connection between the Comprehensive Plan reconfirmation, the Future Land Use Map, and the type of code the City will implement, the following questions deserve direct answers before the August 15 draft is finalized:

1. FLUM Category Structure

Is SE Group designing the new Future Land Use Map with conventional categories , compatible with Rifle’s existing zone districts , or with Form Based Code transect categories that would require a new code structure? This is the most consequential technical question on the table tonight.

2. The Code Decision: Who Makes It and When?

The type of land use code Rifle adopts is a major policy decision that belongs to the City Council. Has Council formally directed staff to pursue Form Based Code? If not, the FLUM should be designed to preserve flexibility until that decision is made explicitly.

3. Consistency with the 2019 Plan’s Framework

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan’s Growth Principles and Tiered Growth System are staying in the reconfirmed plan. Were those principles written with FBC or conventional zoning in mind? Does a FBC-structured FLUM support or complicate the Tiered Growth System Rifle already relies on?

4. Community Engagement Transparency

Was Form Based Code presented to the public as the intended regulatory direction during stakeholder interviews, focus groups, or the community survey? Did residents evaluate FBC specifically, or only the outcomes , walkability, housing diversity, downtown activation , that FBC is one of several tools to achieve?

5. Cost and Staff Capacity

Has staff or SE Group prepared an estimate of what full FBC adoption would cost in consultant fees, staff time, training, and ongoing administration? How does that compare to a targeted hybrid approach that achieves similar outcomes in priority districts?

6. Colorado Comparables

Can SE Group identify Colorado communities of comparable size that have successfully implemented full FBC, and describe what their experience looked like in terms of cost, staff capacity, timeline, and implementation challenges?

Bottom Line

The Comprehensive Plan reconfirmation is the right process at the right time. The 2019 plan’s core framework , Growth Principles, Tiered Growth System, infrastructure-coordinated development , remains sound and should be preserved.

The question raised here is not whether the plan should be reconfirmed, or whether Form Based Code has merit as a planning tool. The question is whether the Future Land Use Map , the bridge between the plan and the code , is being structured in a way that pre-decides a major regulatory direction before Council has weighed in on it.

If the FLUM is drafted in FBC transect language, it will effectively require a full code replacement regardless of what Council ultimately decides. That is too significant a commitment to make implicitly through a map category choice.

The right sequence is: Council and the Commission agree on the vision in the Comprehensive Plan. The FLUM reflects that vision using categories that preserve regulatory options. Council then explicitly decides what code structure best implements the plan , conventional, FBC, or a targeted hybrid , with full information, proper cost analysis, and a clear public mandate.

Tonight's joint workshop is the right moment to ensure that sequence is being followed.



Agenda Item #a.

Agenda Item Name:

Comprehensive Plan Reconfirmation Discussion with SE Group

Presenter:

Zach Higgins, Community Development Director

Item Description:

Discussion with Planning Commission and City Council regarding current status of the Comprehensive Plan Reconfirmation. Survey results and Stakeholder feedback will be made available to inform the conversation.

Recommended Action:

No action required. General direction on the last few steps before drafting the new Comp Plan.

Fiscal Impact:

None at this time.

Operational Impact:

None at this time.

Prior Board Motions:

N/A

Background Information:

Staff has been working with SE Group over the last six months to gather feedback from stakeholders and the general public. This has happened through one on one conversations, stakeholder group meetings, and surveys.

Executive Summary:

See presentation attachment for more specific discussion content.

Notification Requirements:

N/A

Prepared By:

Zach Higgins, Community Development Director

Attachments:

1. Rifle Plan Reconfirmation Update 6.10.26



City of Rifle Comprehensive Plan Reconfirmation Update

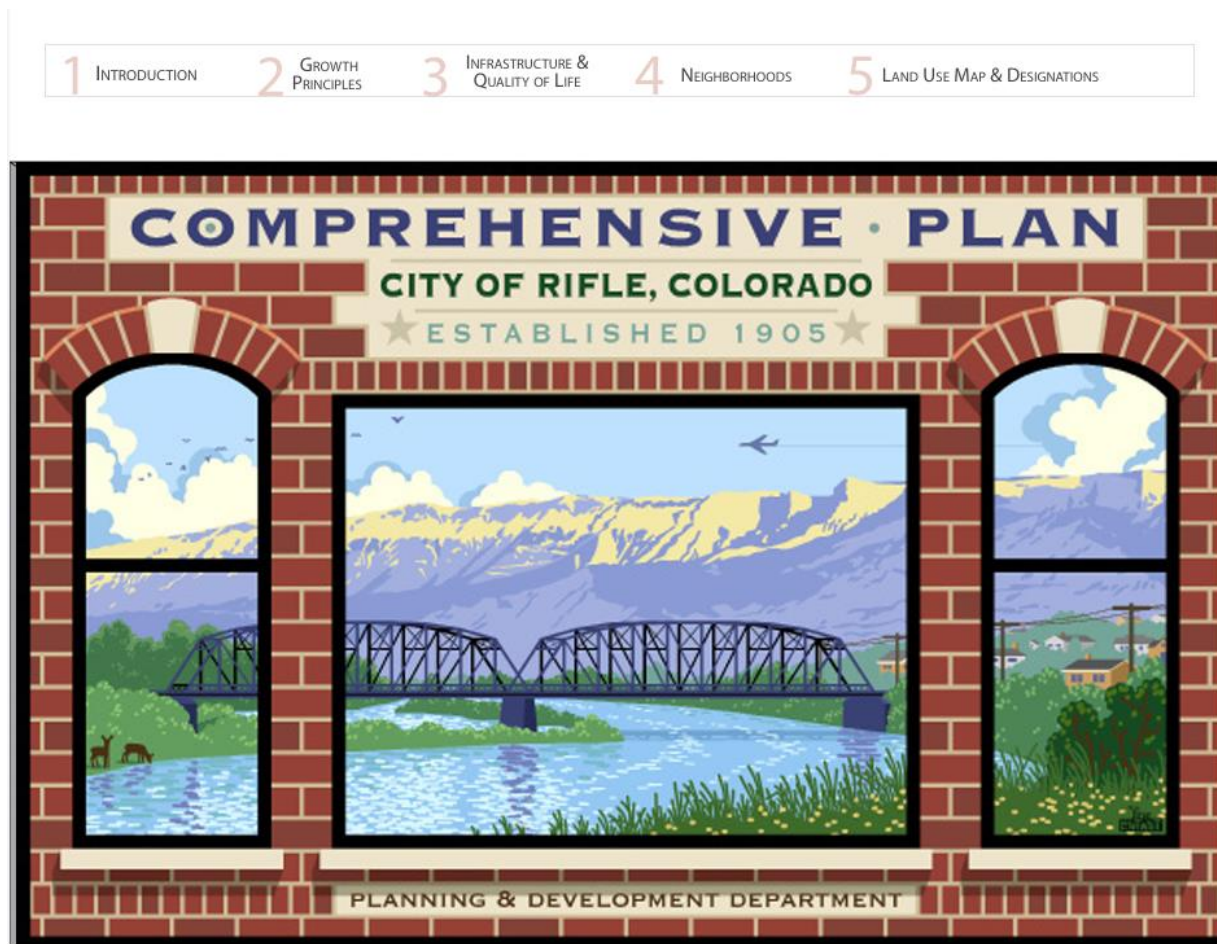
City of Rifle Planning Commission

6/10/26

About the Rifle Comprehensive Plan

- Sets the long-term vision for growth in the city
- Guides decisions on housing, transportation, economy, and more
- 20-year timeframe, last one was adopted in 2019 but needs updating

We're **updating** and **reconfirming** this plan.



Why Reconfirm the Plan?

- Since 2019, several important plans and initiatives have been completed, including:
 - Housing Study & Action Plan
 - Energy & Resilience Action Plan (ERAP)
 - Safe Streets & Roads for All Plan
 - Strategic Plan
 - Existing Conditions Assessment
- The reconfirmation process is intended to confirm what still works, identify what needs refinement, and address new issues and opportunities.

What the Existing Plan & Initial Conversations Told Us

- Housing affordability and availability remain the community's biggest housing challenges.
- There is support for a wider variety of housing options, including ADUs, cottage courts, townhomes, multifamily housing, and smaller-lot homes.
- Growth should be coordinated with infrastructure capacity and long-term maintenance considerations.
- South Rifle is viewed as a major opportunity area for future housing and workforce housing.

Today's Presentation

- Review work completed to date
- Summarize findings from recent plans and community engagement
- Discuss the proposed approach to updating the Comprehensive Plan
- Confirm that the project is focused on the right priorities

Our Goal: The reconfirmed plan will reflect current conditions, recent planning efforts, community priorities, and future implementation needs. It will set the City up for a successful and coordinated land use code update.

Project Status & Schedule

Completed

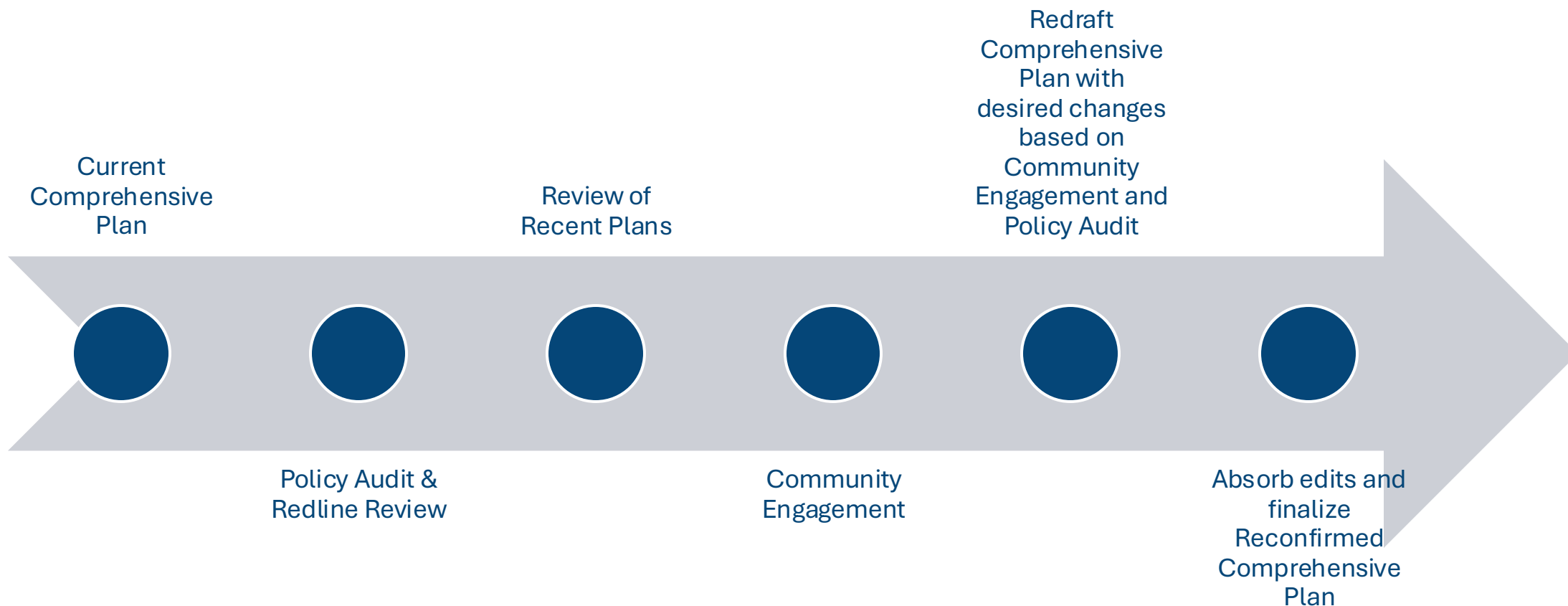
- Existing Conditions Assessment and Consultant Site Visit
- Comprehensive Plan Policy Audit
- Review of Recent Plans
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Housing & Development Focus Group
- Economic Development Focus Group
- Senior Focus Group
- High School Workshop & Survey
- Educational Content and Outreach
- Community Survey (ongoing)

Upcoming

- Completing Community Engagement
 - Hispanic Community Focus Group
- Draft Plan Framework
- Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Staff Review
- Public Review Draft
- Adoption Process

Key Milestone: Draft Comprehensive Plan Target – August 15, 2026

How We Are Updating the Plan



As of Now: How the Plan Is Expected to Change

What Will Likely Stay the Same

- Growth Principles
- Tiered Growth System
- Overall plan framework

What Will Be Added/Adjusted

- Housing Chapter
- Transportation Chapter
- South Rifle-specific guidance
- Expanded implementation framework
- Goals, Policies & Actions structure
- Future Land Use Map that sets the stage for the Code Update
- Water and Strategic Growth Elements

Emerging Plan Priorities

- Housing Choice & Affordability
- Transportation & Connectivity
- Economic Vitality
- Infrastructure, Core Services, & Managing Growth
- South Rifle
- Quality of Life & Community Amenities

These priorities are emerging consistently across recent plans and community engagement.

Housing & Development Focus Group

Takeaways

- Housing affordability and availability remain the community's biggest housing challenges.
- Support for a wider variety of housing options, including ADUs, cottage courts, townhomes, multifamily housing, and smaller-lot homes.
- Growth should be coordinated with infrastructure capacity and long-term maintenance considerations.
- South Rifle is viewed as a major opportunity area for future housing and workforce housing.

What this means for the plan:

Strengthen housing affordability policies, support housing diversity, clarify growth and infrastructure priorities, and develop a South Rifle vision.

Economic Development Focus Group

Takeaways

- Rifle's economy is shifting toward construction, recreation, service industries, and entrepreneurship.
- Workforce development, trades training, and business succession planning are major priorities.
- Housing affordability and availability are affecting workforce attraction and business growth.
- Downtown remains a key asset but needs more activity, restaurants, gathering spaces, and identity.

What this means for the plan:

Support diversification, strengthen downtown activation, improve recreation connections, and recognize housing as an economic development issue.

Preliminary Community Survey Results

Note: Survey remains open through later this month; results are preliminary.

- Residents value outdoor recreation, small-town character, and the sense of community.
- Affordability and cost of living are the dominant concerns.
- Top investment priorities include parks, trails, streetscape improvements, and gathering spaces.

What this means for the Plan:

Prioritize housing affordability, quality-of-life investments, transportation improvements, and strategic growth management.

Student Survey Results

- 215 students participated in the survey.
- Students identified a lack of activities, entertainment, and places to spend time as the biggest challenge facing youth in Rifle.
- Affordability, housing costs, and the overall cost of living were major concerns, even among high school students.
- A recreation center was the single most requested improvement, along with additional gathering spaces, restaurants, shopping, and activities.
- Students also emphasized sidewalks, trails, biking, transportation options, and safe ways to travel independently.

What this means for the plan:

Support youth-oriented recreation, improve mobility options, address affordability concerns, and maintain the small-town character students value.