
CHAPTER 1:
Douglas County Perspective

This chapter is new to the 2006 Master Plan. Refer to Chapter 2: “Summary of Changes Reflected in 2006 Update” for a complete summary of changes to the 2006 Master Plan.

Setting

Douglas County has some of the most beautiful scenery in Nevada. It offers an attractive climate and a rural character that attracts new residents and visitors alike. With an approximate area of 751 square miles, it is located in the western portion of the state, just south of Carson City, the state capital, and 35 miles south of the state’s second largest city, Reno. Douglas County is located less than two hours from the Sacramento metropolitan area and less than four hours from the San Francisco and San Jose metropolitan areas.

The county borders California to the west, Lyon County to the east, and Carson City to the north. Included within its boundaries are portions of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, Lake Tahoe, Spooner Lake, Topaz Lake, and the Carson and Walker Rivers. Home to some of Nevada’s earliest development, Douglas County is comprised of many small communities scattered along the base of the Sierra and contains remnants of some of the first towns in the state.

Since 1960, the county has grown from a small, predominantly agricultural community to an increasingly urban population center. Its population grew most rapidly during the 1970's and experienced continued significant growth in the 1980's and 1990's and up through 2005. This growth mirrors growth trends at the state level. The US Census Bureau’s estimated 2005 population figures indicate that Nevada is the fastest growing state in the nation, with a total population of 2.4 million people and an average annual growth rate of 4.2 percent between 2000 and 2005. This growth is anticipated by the State Demographer to continue statewide at the same rate in the next 10 years and then reduce to a slower rate. Growth in Douglas County for the same period mirrors state trends, anticipated to continue but at a lower rate than the overall state. A significant portion of Nevada’s increase in population results from in-migration, with approximately one-third of the new residents from California.

The population increase in Douglas County has been due in part to the statewide tax system, climate, land availability, reasonable environmental/development regulation, and natural, visual and recreational amenities available. The increase in population followed the statewide trend, which was primarily a result of the Nevada tax system.

Located within the Great Basin, the county’s climate varies significantly because of the varying elevation and adjacent mountain ranges. The climate can be best described as the northern high desert, which is controlled by the pacific high pressure ridge. Winter temperatures range from about 19 to 47 degrees Fahrenheit, while summer temperatures range from about 43 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit.

The three primary geographic areas are the Lake Tahoe Basin; the Carson Valley; and Topaz Lake/Topaz Ranch Estates (TRE). The primary population center of the county is the Carson Valley, which also contains the Town of Minden, the County seat. The Carson Valley also contains two other unincorporated towns, Gardnerville and Genoa, Nevada’s oldest settlement. The Carson Valley is the county’s commercial, industrial and governmental center. The Lake Tahoe Basin contains the Stateline casino/resort core area, a major tax and employment generator for the county. The Topaz Lake/TRE area is located approximately

fifteen miles south of Gardnerville and is the least populated of the three areas. Topaz Lake Recreation Area is located within this area and provides many recreational and scenic opportunities.

The leading employment industries are in service (including gaming and hospitality), trade, manufacturing, and government. The service, trade, and manufacturing sectors have consistently been the primary sources of employment for the county. Agriculture is a business, and while it is small in terms of the percentage of employment, it is significant in terms of its economic, social, and environmental value and contributions to the visual character of the landscape and quality of life.

Past and Present

Douglas County has a rich history dating from the early Indian settlements through the first trade routes and explorations in the 1800's to the more recent past. The Washoe Tribe inhabited an area of approximately 4,000 square miles and spoke a language called Hoka. The Washoe people tended to be seasonal dwellers. In the warmer months, they spent time fishing, hunting, and gathering in higher mountainous areas and in the colder months, they traveled back down to the valley floor. Their skills involved hunting, fishing, and basket making.

Several major exploration trails crossed the county. The trails include the John C. Fremont/Joseph R. Walker Trail (1845-1846); the California Trail (1834-1858); and the Great Sheep Trails (1870-1890). The first white settlement in Nevada was established in 1851 as a trading post by three Mormon settlers in what is now the town of Genoa. Genoa was a major merchandising point in the region, located on both the Pony Express and Overland Stage routes. The community served as the seat of the territorial government until 1861 and served as the County seat until 1916.

Starting in about 1853, claims were made in the Carson Valley for ranches. Ranching and farming are an important part of the heritage of the Carson Valley. By 1860, a wagon trail had been constructed connecting Sacramento and Virginia City. The road was privately owned and tolls were charged for using the all season facility. It was sold to Douglas County in 1889. After discovery of the Comstock Lode (1858), settlers extended the natural meadows in Carson Valley through irrigation to provide hay, meat and butter for the miners in Virginia City and neighboring towns. By 1881, there were about 30,000 acres of land ~~enclosed~~fenced in ~~by fences~~by ranchers with names still familiar today, such as Dangberg, Settlemeyer, Park, Springmeyer, Dressler, Van Sickle, and Klauber.

After 1851, Genoa was the center for British settlers (largely Mormon), and Gardnerville, after 1879, became the center for 1870 Danish immigrants. From 1870, German, Danish and Swiss immigrants enlarged the area more to supply produce to surrounding mining towns that were booming. Starting in 1898, Spanish and French Basque shepherds tended some 13,000 sheep in Carson Valley, increasing to 25,000 by 1925, when the Basques began acquiring their own sheep and land.

Minden, the seat of Douglas County since 1916, was named for a town in Westphalia, Germany, where the founder of the H.F. Dangberg Land and Live Stock Company was born. The company established Minden in 1905 to provide terminal facilities for the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, which was then extending a branch line southward from Carson City. The passenger and freight depot was situated at this point. The son of the founder of the H.F. Dangberg Land and Live Stock Company was a secretary of the company and was instrumental in promoting the town. The Dangberg Company presented a plan of the town of

Minden to the Douglas County Commissioners in July of 1906, following a rectilinear grid pattern. Since the 1920's, new subdivisions have altered the symmetrical pattern of the town.

The nucleus of the town of Minden developed from 1906 until around 1940, and then remained essentially static for the next thirty or so years. In the late 1950's some small subdivisions appeared, and new commercial ventures were developed along Highway 395. By the mid-1970's growth accelerated, with major subdivisions and new businesses being established. This growth continued in the 1980's, 1990's, and to the mid 2000's.

The current County Master Plan was adopted in 1996 and comprises seven elements to address open space, housing, economic development, water and sewer services, and traffic and roads. In recent years, there has been increased public awareness and concern that the rural quality of the county was in jeopardy. As a result, there has been an elevated interest by the public and elected board members with protecting agricultural and natural resources in the county and providing recreational amenities and providing open space. These issues along with creating a healthy balanced economic and housing condition are the basis for many of the recommendations associated with the 2006 master plan update.

Planning for Tomorrow

Planning for future growth will ensure that the rural quality of life that has kept families here for generations is maintained not only for current residents, but also for their children and grandchildren. Our quality of life depends on the air, water, and soil, as well as views, open space, economic vibrancy, and a strong agricultural heritage. As the demand for growth continues, the quality of life, the character of our community and the health and direction of our economy can be impacted. With conscious thought and deliberate decision making, we can maintain the natural and cultural resources we enjoy and protect this quality of life for generations to come.

Douglas County is committed to implementing sustainable practices to enhance the quality of life in the county and protect natural resources.

The term “sustainable” was defined by the Brundtland Commission in 1987:

“meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

In the context of Douglas County, it is important that planning for the future incorporates discussion and measures to protect natural and agricultural resources while supporting local business and economic development and maximizing the quality of life for residents. Implementation of sustainable practices can reduce the demands for resources. Smart, forward thinking planning is fundamental to ensure the quality and amount of anticipated growth is strategic and doesn't negatively affect resources and quality of life for existing and future residents.

The 1996 Master Plan provided a number of mechanisms to manage and direct growth pressures to allow for a growth rate that does not negatively impact the community. A growth rate between 2 and 3.5 percent annually was suggested to attain this goal. The county still recognizes this growth rate as a measure of sustainability and quality of life.

Context of Decision Making

Structure of Government

Citizen participation on various Douglas County boards and commissions serves two important purposes: (1) Residents are directly involved in their local government and can positively impact the future of the community, and (2) The Board of Commissioners receives timely input and information regarding needs, benefits, concerns, and potential impacts.

Residents elect officials to provide community leadership and administration. Currently, the County operates under a commission-manager form of government, including elected officials, departments, boards, commissions, and committees. The various departments, boards, commissions, and committees within Douglas County government provide a full range of services to residents.

The electorate of Douglas County elects the following positions:

- Assessor
- Clerk Treasurer
- Recorder
- District Attorney
- Judges
- Sheriff
- County Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners is the governing, legislative body for Douglas County. The five members of the Board are elected county-wide, by district. The duties of the Board of Commissioners are to:

- Provide County leadership;
- Develop policies guiding the County in the delivery of services and achieving community goals;
- Encourage resident awareness and involvement;
- Maintain financial stability by overseeing the County budget process and allocations; and
- Oversee the County Manager.

The Douglas County Board of Commissioners actively seeks to promote several goals in order to continue to improve the quality of life in Douglas County. These goals are established each year and are the basis of many decisions rendered by the Board.

The County Manager is the chief administrative official, overseeing County Departments including:

- Administrative Services
- Community Services
- Communications
- Community Development
- Geographic Information Services
- Operational Services

Douglas County also includes the unincorporated towns of Minden, Gardnerville, and Genoa. Within each town, the Town Council acts as the governing legislative body and has jurisdiction over such issues as drainage, trash, and lighting. To address issues that are unique to a region or community, policies are

established in the Regional or Community Plan that apply strictly to the defined area and deal with issues that are special concerns to that community. Towns, along with the Planning Commission, are advisory to the Board of Commissioners.

General Improvement Districts (GIDs) are created pursuant to NRS Chapter 318, being created by the board of commissioners in any county in Nevada. GIDs have the authority to set and charge rates, fees and tolls for provision of facilities that enhance the general health, safety and welfare of the community, such as water, sewer and trash. They are governed by an elected Board of Trustees that act on behalf of the electorate and may borrow or raise funds to acquire, construct and/or provide those facilities. They also have the power to levy and collect taxes necessary to sustain operations.

The Master Plan process is administered by the Community Development Director under the authority of the County Manager and the County Board of Commissioners. The Planning Commission advises and manages this process.

Planning History in Douglas County

The Planning Commission consists of seven members who are appointed by the Board of Commissioners and provides advice on land use planning matters, reviews development applications for compliance with County plans/ordinances, and provides oversight in the Master Plan process.

This Master Plan has been prepared in response to Nevada Revised Statutes 278.150 through 278.170, which state that a Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors (or governing body) shall prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the County.

The County shall review the Master Plan on an annual basis per NRS. In addition, it is recommended that major reviews occur at least every five (5) years for the term of the plan beginning in CY 2000.

The annual review process will allow the County to update and implement minor revisions to the plan and the goals and policies contained therein. This review should include a report on the implementation process and the success/failures of the plan, along with recommendations for revision (which may include review as part of the 5-year process).

The 5-year review will allow the County to ascertain whether the prioritization and overall direction is consistent with the community's desires. In addition, this review will provide an opportunity to look at the success of long-term implementation strategies contained in this plan. This review and update may allow the County to extend the planning horizon beyond the year 2015 and eliminate the need for the timely and costly major Master Plan Revisions.

1996 Master Plan

The current Master Plan, adopted in April of 1996, provided the framework and supportive goals and policies to aid in the decision making process. Over the course of development of the Master Plan, numerous public workshops, surveys, interviews, and meetings were conducted to determine and gauge public opinion and desires for the future of Douglas County.

A number of common and consistent themes were evident from the public discussion. First, many residents feel strongly that Douglas County is an excellent place to live, work, and raise their children. The

protection of this high quality of life and the particular features which make this county so attractive was a high priority. The theme “keep our rural character” was heard many times and in many different ways from residents.

Most residents acknowledged and supported continued growth, but believed that growth should be managed or directed and should occur at a pace that doesn't overwhelm or negatively impact the current attributes of the county. Most residents also indicated that the county should live within its means, both fiscally and environmentally, and not grow beyond the limits imposed by financial ability or natural resources. Finally, most residents agreed that new development should pay its own way and should not be a burden on existing residents.

1996 Master Plan Implementation

The adoption of the master plan resulted in the preparation, revisions and adoption of several codes and programs that assist in implementing the goals and polices outlined in the plan. These include:

- The initial revision of the Development Code in November 1996
- The adoption of the Transportation Plan as a separate document in April 1996
- The completion of consistency zoning in 1997
- The preparation and approval of the Design Standards Manual in 1998
- The preparation and approval of the Open sSpace Plan in 2000
- Major revisions to the Transfer Ddevelopment Rights Program in 2001
- The year-by-year preparation of five-year Capital Improvements Plans that started in 2001
- The second major revision to the Development Code completed in 2001
- The adoption of the Trails Plan in 2003.

Recent Voter Initiatives

Since the adoption of the master plan, there have been initiatives put before the voters of Douglas County that are worth noting.

Sales Tax measure for Open Space - 2000

The draft Open Space and Agricultural Lands Protection Plan (adopted 9/7/2000) was used to develop an open space funding ballot question to be presented to the voters in the November 2000 general election. If the ballot question ~~ishad been~~ approved, it would have provided the mechanism for the County to implement a ¼ cent sales tax dedicated to funding a purchase of development rights program. The measure failed.

Sustainable Growth Initiative - 2002

In 2002, the Sustainable Growth Initiative Committee (SGIC) proposed a 280 unit per year growth cap question on the general election ballot as a way to support the rural lifestyle of Douglas County. It passed 53% to 46%. This initiative, widely supported in the county, was concerned with the quality of life for residents and was also initiated to provide controlled growth and protection of water resources. These sentiments expressed by Voters have guided the updates made to the Master Plan. The initiative has not

been implemented as it has been tied up in litigation, the plaintiffs including Douglas County and various corporate parties.

2006 Master Plan Update

The 1996 Master Plan is a thorough document that provided the research and analysis necessary to establish and adopt the goals and policies that provide the framework for the 2006 update. With the adoption of the various plans, codes and standards described earlier, the 2006 Master Plan update has three specific purposes.

- Review and revise goals and polices to reflect the needs of the county since it was originally adopted.
- Restructure the document to be more visionary including establishing the core values that will provide the basis for future decision making.
- Simplify the document and making it easier to read and understand.

In April of 2005, the County staff started the 2006 Master Plan update by initiating public meetings with all the communities throughout the county. This information was then summarized and presented to the Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission in a joint work session in early 2006 to help with reassessing the values that were important for the citizens. This consisted of providing current land use, zoning, flood zone maps of the area for discussion, review of the master plan goals and policies for each respective community, and providing a list of programs implementing the Master Plan since adoption in 1996.

In March of 2006, the County hired a consulting firm to assist with completing a five-year update, as called for in the Plan, to specifically review its goals and policies. The consultant team worked with County staff to identify the current status of implementation of the Master Plan to determine progress made and items to be addressed in this Update. Through the discussions and review of the goals and policies during the update process, the consultant and the County identified that over 300 of the 400 goals and policies have been implemented within the first 10 years of plan adoption. The continued review of these goals and policies will occur on an annual basis as part of the yearly master plan update process.

Using the information collected at the community meetings, the consultant team worked with the Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission to define the vision and values for Douglas County and to refine the overall goals for the Master Plan. These goals, taken from the introductory chapter (Chapter 2) of the 1996 Master Plan, were consolidated and revised and used as the basis for the changes in the 2006 Update. The vision and value statements are included in Chapter 2: Framework of the Master Plan.

The County held four public open house meetings to present information and gathered additional input regarding the master plan update. In addition, stakeholders representing business, open space, and agriculture interests participated in eight working group meetings to provide input and recommend changes to the Plan's goals and policies for Economic Development, Growth Management, and Land Use. Based on stakeholder input, a separate Agriculture Element has been added to the 2006 Update. The purpose of this Element is to elevate the importance that agriculture provides and establish specific goals and policies to encourage agriculture and agricultural related business to continue to operate within the county. A summary of the changes made to the Master Plan is provided in Chapter 2.

Regional Planning Organizations

There are a few regional planning organizations that include Douglas County. These broader planning organizations are important in addressing issues that affect the region and include the following:

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA)

This bi-state agency oversees development within the Lake Tahoe basin. The Lake Tahoe Regional Planning Area of Douglas County is included in this jurisdiction. Planning and development within this area must be consistent with TRPA regulations. One Douglas County Commissioner holds a place on the TRPA Governing Board.

Carson Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) were established under the authority of Title 23 of the United States Code. MPO's are designated for urbanized areas with a population of more than 50,000 individuals by agreement between the Governor and local government units. In 2003, Nevada's governor designated the Carson Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) as the agency responsible for the transportation planning for Carson's urbanized area. CAMPO consists of representatives from Carson City, Douglas County, and the Nevada Department of Transportation

Northern Nevada Development Authority

Funded by the state's Nevada Commission on Economic Development, the counties, cities, membership dues, grants, and fund-raisers. The corporation is a federally tax exempt not-for-profit organization governed by a working board of directors. The board is made up of local government, county and city managers, and for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. Douglas County is represented by the County Manager.

Regional and Community Planning

The purpose of regional and community planning is to ensure that the distinctive character of each regional or community area is established, maintained, and enhanced. Issues that are of special concern to the community, such as land use development or public improvements, are addressed by policies in the Community Plan for each town which also contains detailed implementation measures. These action measures can address issues such as design standards and special use provisions. The goals and policies contained in the County Master Plan's other elements also apply to the areas covered by a Regional or Community Plan. The Regional or Community Plan policies are consistent with the County Master Plan.

Together, the vision for these areas of Douglas County in 20 years is to be:

- A collection of coherent, small sized towns surrounded by ranches or open space, nestled in a beautiful setting.
- An economically strong and well integrated county fostering local businesses, ranching and farming, outside investment, and regional cooperations.
- An environmentally aware community with distinctive open spaces, natural features, and outdoor recreation.

- A good place for all kinds of people to live and lead healthy, happy, productive lives.
- A place with a distinct sense of history and identity.

Regional planning areas include:

- Tahoe Planning Area
- Sierra Planning Area
- Topaz Planning Area

Community planning areas include:

- Carson Valley
- North, South, and Central Agriculture
- Airport
- East Valley
- Fish Springs
- Foothill
- Gardnerville Ranchos
- Genoa
- Indian Hills/Jacks Valley
- Johnson Lane
- Minden/Gardnerville
- Ruhenstroth
- Pinenut
- Topaz Ranch Estates/Holbrook

Goals and Policies designed to address issues that are unique to these regions and communities can be found in Chapter 13. These Goals and Policies apply strictly to the defined area and deal with issues that are special concerns to that community. These may include Policies that contain more detailed requirements for land use, development, or public improvements than are identified in those Plan Elements that apply county-wide. The Regional or Community Plan also contains detailed implementation measures. These action measures address issues such as design standards and special use provisions. The Goals and Policies contained in the Plan's other Elements also apply to the areas covered by a Regional or Community Plan.