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Statement of Purpose

Sandoval County is rich in diversity. It borders New Mexico's largest metropolitan area, yet contains vast open spaces, including some of the state's most scenic natural and historic areas. It includes the state's fastest growing city within a short drive of rural villages and pueblos where the population has changed little for generations. The county boasts a higher median household income than the state as a whole, but many county residents still commute to jobs located outside the county.

The county is facing growth pressures of enormous proportions. In particular, the Rio Grande Valley is an area under severe pressure from development in Bernalillo County and from Rio Rancho. Such pressures will only intensify in the future. Controversy is likely to accompany any major changes in land use until decisions are reached on how development should unfold in Sandoval County.

This comprehensive plan is a policy statement intended to govern development decisions on lands subject to control by Sandoval County. The plan establishes a framework for future decisions by county officials regarding land use, transportation, and public services in Sandoval County.

The plan was developed by the Sandoval County Planning and Zoning Commission, with the support of the Sandoval County Board of Commissioners and the able assistance of the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments. The Commission sought public comment on the plan and held public hearings for this purpose. It is the hope of the Board of County Commissioners that this comprehensive plan truly reflects the hopes and aspirations of all residents regarding future land use patterns in the County.

In 2002, the Planning and Zoning Commission reexamined the Comprehensive Plan in light of the changes that had occurred in the County since its original adoption. Due to the generalized nature of its Policies and Strategies and the diverse and geographically large area of Sandoval County, it was believed that the Plan was still valid in its original form with minor updates to the supporting text. More detailed planning, tailored to the needs of individual communities within the County, will be accomplished via area plans.

Planning Process

During the summer of 1986, Sandoval County began a comprehensive planning process intended to provide public officials and County residents with an understanding of the elements that make up the County and a vision for rational and reasonable development in the County. A citizens group, the Sandoval County Planning and Zoning Task Force, was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners. The Task Force succeeded in collecting and analyzing data on the County's land use, population, infrastructure, economy, and natural, historic, and cultural resources. In addition, at the request of the Board of County Commissioners, the Task Force prepared and held hearings on a plan for the Algodones area, the Algodones Area Policies Plan, and the plan was subsequently adopted by the Board in March, 1987.

During the summer of 1987, the Sandoval County Planning Commission was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to serve as a permanent planning body for the County. The Commission was asked to develop a comprehensive plan for Sandoval County, but initially to address the critical need for land use controls in Algodones.

Consistent with the comprehensive plan developed by the Task Force, the Commission prepared a zoning ordinance for Sandoval County, but limited its initial application to the Algodones area. Hearings were held on the ordinance during the Fall of 1987, and the ordinance was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in December, 1987. In 1990, the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance was extended to the rest of the unincorporated area of the County outside of Algodones. Following a series of public meetings held throughout Sandoval County in 1999, this Ordinance was updated by the Planning & Zoning Commission with assistance from Planning & Zoning Staff and members of the public. The updated Ordinance was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in 2001.

After adoption of the zoning ordinance for the Algodones area in 1988 the Board of County Commissioners renamed the Commission the Sandoval County Planning and Zoning Commission and requested that the Commission act as a zoning authority for Algodones as well as proceed in the preparation of a comprehensive plan for Sandoval County.

In preparing the comprehensive plan, the Commission has attempted to synthesize and integrate the work of the Task Force and the results of its own experience gained in developing a zoning ordinance for Sandoval County and acting as the zoning authority for Algodones. The plan is intended to provide an overall framework for land use development in Sandoval County. In regions or subregions of the County where growth pressures require more detailed planning, as was the case in Algodones, area plans will be prepared. If appropriate, based on the overall comprehensive plan and the area plan for the region or subregion, the Sandoval County zoning ordinance will be amended to further regulate development activities.

Structure of this Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan for Sandoval County is divided into four sections: I) Land Use and Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources, II) County Infrastructure, III) Services to the Public, and IV) Economic Development. Each section contains specific policies which are followed by various strategies intended to carry out the policy in terms of activities, programs, or regulations. These policies reflect long-term goals and acceptable procedures to guide present and future development in the County.

SECTION I

Land Use and Natural, Historic, and Cultural Resources

- A. **POLICY:** Sandoval County shall be developed in ways which take into account diverse, distinctive geographic areas within the county, the needs and desires of the people living in each geographical area, traditional land uses, and development trends, especially those resulting from the growth of the Albuquerque metropolitan area.

STRATEGIES:

1. For land use planning purposes only, Sandoval County is divided into six planning regions, each of which corresponds to a general geographic area of the county. A map showing the general boundaries of the six planning regions is attached to, and shall be considered a part of, this comprehensive plan. The lines on the map showing the boundaries of the planning regions are approximate.
2. The six planning regions are as follows:
 - A. **The Rio Grande Valley**, from the boundary with Bernalillo County on the south to Bandelier National Monument on the north, and from I-25 on the east to the highest irrigation ditch carrying water from the Rio Grande on the west. Sandia Pueblo, Bernalillo, Pueblo de Santa Ana, Algodones, San Felipe Pueblo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, Cochiti Pueblo, Pena Blanca, and Cochiti Lake are all located in this district.
 - B. **The Southeast Corner**, which includes all of Sandoval County to the east of the Rio Grande Valley. The Sandia mountains and the communities located in and around those mountains are the chief feature of this region. Prominent settlements include Placitas and surrounding communities, and La Madera.
 - C. **Rio Rancho and Rio Puerco**, which includes all of the area in south central Sandoval County bounded by the escarpment of the Rio Grande Valley on the east, the Laguna Indian Reservation on the west, the boundary with Bernalillo County on the south, and a line extending from the northeast corner of the Laguna Reservation to the point where US 550 crosses the western boundary of the Zia and Santa Ana reservations on the north. This region includes all of Rio Rancho and the planned communities located on either side of the proposed Northwest Loop Road, a road currently being planned that will connect I-40 to US 550.

- D. **The Northwest Corner**, starting from a point on the boundary with Rio Arriba County immediately north of Fenton Lake, the region is defined by a line extending south and west to Mesa Venado, then south to Coyote Flats, and then west to the boundary with McKinley County. Communities in this district include Cuba, Regina, La Jara, and Torreon.
 - E. **The Jemez Mountains**, which covers all of the central part of the county. The district is bounded on the east by the highest ditch carrying water from the Rio Grande, the western boundary of Bandelier National Monument, and Los Alamos County line; on the north, by the Rio Arriba County line from the intersection with Los Alamos County on the east to the point immediately north of Fenton Lake; on the west, by a line extending south and west to La Cueva Springs and then south and east around Canones and San Ysidro, so that both the villages of Canones and San Ysidro and lands immediately adjacent to these villages are in this district; and on the south by a line along the northern bank of the Jemez River to the boundary with the Rio Grande Valley planning region. Prominent communities in the district include Jemez Springs, La Cueva, Ponderosa, Canon, Jemez Pueblo, San Ysidro, Canones, Zia Pueblo, and associated lands of the Pueblo de Santa Ana.
 - F. **The Western Ranch Country**, which is all of the county west of the Jemez Mountain and Rio Rancho-Rio Puerco planning regions, and south of the Northwest Corner planning region.
3. The six planning regions detailed above possess differing physical characteristics and development trends. Each region has a unique combination of growth pressures and constraints on such growth. Such factors must be taken into account in meaningful land use planning.
 4. Sandoval County intends to develop land use plans that reflect the unique characteristics, constraints, and growth pressures of the region or for areas within the region, yet are consistent with this comprehensive plan. The County may appoint Regional Planning Boards to assist the Sandoval County Planning and Zoning Commission to develop land use plans and, if appropriate, land use controls.

B. POLICY: Sandoval County shall retain a prevailing rural residential character

while promoting an orderly development of business and industry in appropriate locations.

STRATEGIES:

1. Sandoval County shall maintain a development review process for any new land development or significant changes to existing land use within the County.
2. Efforts shall be made to protect the traditional, locally important land use patterns existing within the County.
3. Development decisions shall be based on impact on surrounding land uses, particularly in residential and agricultural areas, air and water quality considerations, effect on public health and safety, and the availability of public services and adequate infrastructure.
4. The County shall seek to coordinate and cooperate with all municipalities within the County to encourage more intensive development to locate where municipal utilities such as water and sewer systems are or can be made available.
5. Appropriate sites for industrial and commercial facilities shall be identified and efforts made to encourage new businesses to locate at these sites.
6. Regulations governing the location and make up of other non-residential uses and mobile home parks shall be established.
7. Careful analysis of physical conditions such as soil capabilities, drainage patterns, and the like shall be conducted to determine areas most suitable for development and to ensure that new development does not negatively impact existing development or environmental conditions.
8. Density controls shall be instituted to provide adequate area for on-site liquid waste disposal to occur with a minimum negative impact on ground water supplies.

C. POLICY: Sandoval County shall seek to protect its natural resources and environmentally critical areas from any destructive effects of development.

STRATEGIES:

1. The conservation of water resources shall be a primary consideration for any new development or changes to land use in Sandoval County.
2. The augmenting of water resources shall be researched and promoted through

various strategies to be developed as the need arises.

3. Where feasible, efforts shall be made to require community water supply and liquid waste disposal systems in order to ensure safe drinking water for residents.
4. Protective zones shall be established to insure that critical areas along the Rio Grande and Jemez River are not negatively impacted by development.
5. Critical natural areas elsewhere in the County shall be identified and regulations for their protection shall be put into place where appropriate.
6. Preservation of air quality shall be an important consideration for any new development or changes to land use in the County.
7. Regulations shall be established to ensure that extractive industries do not negatively impact neighboring uses and to see that sites are properly reclaimed after the area is no longer actively used.
8. Efforts shall be undertaken to retain agricultural activity where this is a desired local goal.

D. POLICY: Sandoval County shall protect significant historic sites and preserve traditional cultural practices in the County.

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall work with the Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs, to identify important historic and prehistoric sites and to establish standards and procedures for protecting these sites where feasible.
2. The County shall identify traditional cultural practices of the County worthy of preservation, and take steps to ensure that they are preserved.
3. Future land uses in the County shall be regulated to be consistent with traditional cultural practices.

E. POLICY: As a large percentage of land within the County is not subject to County control, the County shall closely coordinate land use and development activities with the incorporated municipalities, Indian pueblos, and the state and federal governments.

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall clarify authority with municipalities over questions on extraterritorial zoning, subdivision regulations, and roads concerning lands immediately outside municipalities.
2. The County shall, to the extent practicable, work closely with incorporated municipalities located in the County to ensure that County planning activities are compatible with municipal plans.
3. The County shall, to the extent practicable, work closely with adjoining counties and nearby municipalities, particularly with the City of Albuquerque, to ensure that County planning activities are compatible with the plans of such counties and municipalities.
4. The County shall, to the extent practicable, work closely with the nine Indian pueblos, Navajo chapters, and Jicarilla Reservation located either partially or completely within the County to ensure that County planning activities are compatible with the planning of the Indian pueblos.
5. The County shall, to the extent practicable, work closely with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the New Mexico Land Office, and other applicable federal and state agencies to ensure that County planning activities are compatible with the long range planning of the agencies.

SECTION II

County Infrastructure

- A. POLICY:** The planning, development, and maintenance of the Sandoval County road system is essential to support the local economy and to provide for the welfare of the residents.

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall develop and maintain a long-range, county-wide road system plan. The plan shall be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect the needs of rapidly growing areas of the county.
2. Residential densities and commercial and industrial locations shall be regulated to ensure minimal impacts on water quality.
3. Community water supply and waste treatment systems shall be encouraged where feasible.

- B. POLICY:** The future welfare of the County requires the safe, efficient, and most economical methods of solid waste collection, transportation, and disposal on a regional basis.

STRATEGIES:

1. The location of all solid waste disposal sites within the County administered lands shall be subject to the review and approval of the County.
2. Sandoval County supports the regionalization of solid waste management in cooperation with neighboring counties.
3. Hazardous wastes shall be restricted or prohibited from being disposed or stored within the County.

SECTION III

Services to the Public

- A. POLICY: The law enforcement and fire protection services of the County shall retain their high priority standing in the community.**

STRATEGIES:

1. Consideration shall be given to joint or multiple use facilities for the County Sheriff, fire fighters, and rescue services in conjunction with similar services of the municipalities in the County.
2. Consideration shall be given to decentralize facilities for law enforcement and fire protection to increase emergency response time.

- B. POLICY: The County shall maintain a major role in providing for the public health and safety within the County.**

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall actively promote and pursue the development of urgent care facilities within the County, possibly as satellites of facilities based in Albuquerque.
2. A County-wide consolidated medical program shall be developed in conjunction with any other medical programs within as well as outside the County.
3. The County shall develop and maintain a county-wide disaster preparedness plan.

- C. POLICY: The County shall promote a wide variety of education, cultural, and recreational opportunities available to anyone.**

STRATEGIES:

1. Joint-use or shared facilities shall be encouraged in order to expand the availability of education and recreation programs.
2. The County shall encourage and promote “festivals” and other public events identifying a unique or local characteristic.
3. The County shall seek the establishment of local programs in higher education for County residents.

SECTION IV

Economic Development

- A. POLICY:** **In anticipation of the growth of new and different types of local economic activities, the County shall protect and enhance the existing agricultural activities in the County.**

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall attempt to utilize land use controls to buffer agricultural activities from conflicting uses on adjacent land.
2. The County shall seek to attract industries or businesses which support or stimulate agricultural activities in the County.
3. The County shall seek to attract more intensive agricultural activities such as plant nurseries, tree farms, orchards, and livestock breeding operations, to locate in appropriate locations within the County.

- B. POLICY:** **To improve local job opportunities and broaden the tax base, the County shall encourage the location and expansion of desired businesses within Sandoval County.**

STRATEGIES:

1. The County shall promote and assist existing businesses and industries within the County in addition to supporting or encouraging new business or industry.
2. The County shall work with municipalities to attract operations providing a wider variety of goods and services for residents.
3. A County economic development program shall be initiated to assist communities in identifying economic goal and to help attract desired businesses.
4. A County shall work with State and local agencies to identify and publicize sites where increased tourism is feasible.
5. The County shall assist State and local agencies in monitoring and regulating industries which have a potential for polluting the environment.