

## Elbert County Growing

Elbert County, rooted in its western heritage, is a typical rural county located along the fringe of large urban areas, Denver, Aurora, Douglas, Arapahoe and El Paso counties with population growth impacted by these metropolitan areas. The County is approximately 1850 square miles, rural in nature consisting of large tracts of farming and ranching lands. Some large agricultural parcels, particularly in the North West corner of the county, have been approved by the County for development into small acreage subdivisions as growth pressure from the surrounding suburban areas spreads.

Many citizens have stated that Elbert County must be kept rural and limit any future growth within the County. It is interesting to observe that each County Citizen has a unique definition of rural. Some believe that any lot of 5 acres or greater is rural, and approval of future subdivision applications should be minimized.

Those that engage in actual rural agriculture recognize that an acre of land in Elbert County may produce 25 bushels of wheat and each cow requires about 30 acres for feed. This suggests that any economic agricultural endeavor will require a minimum of several hundred acres. Colorado State statues recognize that minimum agricultural parcels size is 35 acres.

The Colorado Demographer, in 2007 estimated that the then population of about 24,000 would grow at an estimated rate of five to six percent per year. Current county population is about 28,000 with actual growth of about 1.5% per year over the last 12 years. Typically, Demographer population growth estimates do not recognize normal economic realities such as the major recession beginning in 2008. Such future economic realities are inevitable affecting future population growth.

Approval of a subdivision application does not cause immediate population growth. Historical subdivision approvals do lead to time-consuming requirements. The following are three examples of subdivisions approved and the actual outcomes:

- 1) Spring Valley Ranch approved in 2001 the construction of over 1800 homes. The County has issued only 400 building permits at this time. Significant infrastructure construction is currently underway which will facilitate future construction of additional homes.
- 2) Miller Ranch approved in 2007 for the construction of about 200 homes. At this time, no homes have been built.
- 3) Bandera/Independence approved in 2009 for about 920 homes still has not applied for any building permits. Future development will probably need several years. Infrastructure construction is currently underway.

Several other subdivisions approved over the years have been abandoned because of economic, ownership and estate considerations.

Zoning and subdivision regulations recently updated, includes language that encourages water conservation and appropriate development practices. The newly adopted

Comprehensive/Master Plan outline future zoning and sub development application requirements. The preservation of individual property rights is paramount. The County must consider all subdivision applications properly submitted and that follow all appropriate regulations.

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