TRUE WEST REVISTED: AUTHENTIC DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS FOR SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS

PROMISE FULFILLED OR DRY MIRAGE?
Why We Wrote This Book In 2003

- West is fastest growing region in the country
- A mediocre track record responding to growth in the 1990s
- Growing recognition of natural limits to growth
King of the Cuts
“You don’t understand—I just have to be on top”

–Shirley Maclaine
What—Me Worry About Hazards?
A SLICE OF PARADISE???
THERE’S SPRAWL IN THEM THAR HILLS!!!
WHITE MEN CAN’T JUMP: AND NEITHER CAN ANTELOPE
“We are rearranging the Alhambra with a steam shovel, and we are proud of our yardage”
--Aldo Leopold
CAN WE GO BEYOND THE LIPSTICK ON A PIG APPROACH?
Back To The Future

- Fastest growing region in the country again

- New challenges—climate change and sustainability, energy development, cost of growth, politics....

- Have promising plans and tools worked??
HOW WE GOT STARTED: LOOKING FOR WORTHY PRECEDENTS
EASTERN SOLUTIONS DON’T ALWAYS COMPUTE
HOW THE WEST IS DIFFERENT

• Climate Extremes—Dry, Hot, Cold
• Extensive Federal Ownership
• Fragile Environment/Wildlife
• Explosive Growth
• Wide Open Spaces and Majestic Scenery
• Native American, Spanish, Mormon Influences
OUR RESEARCH APPROACH

• Historical Precedents
• Major Case Studies
• Focused Case Studies
OUR GOALS:

• Demonstrate that development can be done better

• Present simple, systematic way based on historical precedents and modern best practices

• No formulaic answers
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

FOUR MAJOR INFLUENCES:

1. NATIVE AMERICAN
2. SPANISH LAW OF THE INDIES
3. RAILROAD TOWNS
4. MORMON TOWN PLANNING
NATIVE AMERICAN

- Graceful integration in landscape
- Human scale
- Orientation to sun
- Water conservation
- Intimate public places
SPANISH LAW OF THE INDIES

- Focus town on intimate public squares
- Public squares—design with nature
- Use grid for sun exposure
- Use narrow streets for shade
- Arcades for shelter
- Consistent building materials/styles
Old World  New World
RAILROAD TOWNS AND THE GRID SYSTEM

ADVANTAGES OF THE GRID

- Unlimited expansion
- Sun exposure and views
- Wagon turning radius

DISADVANTAGES OF THE GRID

- Not appropriate for all terrains
- Lack of respect for environment
- Can lead to sprawl
MORMON TOWN PLANNING IDEALS

- Compact, nucleated farming community vs. dispersal
- Population of 15,000-20,000
- 1 square mile with 660 X 660 sq ft blocks
MORMON TOWN PLANNING IDEALS

- Streets 132 feet wide
- One house/lot and uniform 25-foot setback
- Houses of brick and stone
- 3 central blocks for public buildings and temples
HISTORICAL PATTERNS AT SITE LEVEL

- Clustered building patterns
- Simple, land-hugging architecture
- Steeply pitched roofs in mountains; lower profiles in flat/rolling terrain
- Natural colors—but not always
- Fencing and other site elements
REVISITING THE CASE STUDIES

- 7 Major and 17 Focused Case Studies
- Organization:
  -- Geographic, climatic, social setting
  -- Regulatory standards and planning processes
  -- Project description/key elements
  -- Market success
  -- Western pattern language lessons
Douglas County Rural Site Plan: Its Rise & Demise

- Achievements
  - 14 Rural Site Plans approved in 14 years
  - 580 exempt lots
  - 7000 + acres of open space preserved
  - Lambert Ranch (featured case study) 90% built out, approved with 25% density bonus
Rural Site Plan Bonus System

- Up to 100% density bonus (1 unit/ 17.5 acres):
  - 67% open space preserved
  - Design standards compatible with natural environment
  - No fencing in conservation easement
  - Paved roads and off-site improvements
Rural Site Plan Design Considerations

- Open space and scenic rural landscapes
- Wetland / riparian areas
- Critical wildlife habitat
- Minimize tree, vegetation and soil disturbance
- Historical and archaeological features
Lambert Ranch

- 850 acres & 39 home sites
- 25% density bonus beyond standard 1 dwelling per 35 acres
- 50% open space
- No fencing
- Preserve historic ranch buildings
LAMBERT RANCH RURAL SITE PLAN
DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLORADO
923.44 ACRES  37 RESIDENTIAL LOTS
Unsettling Trends

- Ever-lengthening approval timeframes
- Increasing requirements, less predictability
- Larger properties, more lots, smaller lots
- Majority sited in western half of county
Unsettling Trends

- No forum for public input (limited transparency)
- Low build-out rates
- Board vs. staff roles confusing
- Rural character and scale not preserved
Standard vs. Clustered

Douglas County, Colorado

35-Acre Density

A  11 - 46%

B  13 - 54%

Split Preference
Death to the Density Bonus

- Remuda Ranch RSP approved Feb. 2009 (no bldg. permits ever pulled)
- Rural Site Plan process repealed April 2009
Multiple Strategies to Preserve Rural Values

- Design guidelines, not regulations
- Scalable standards
- New rural roadway design standards (gravel for small developments; 5 different cross-section options)
- Rural residential driveways — 3 homes
Multiple Strategies

- Single lot wildfire mitigation plan by County Mitigation Specialist
- Rural fire fighting standards for water supplies
- Political direction: incentives and opportunities
- Exemptions simplified
- As-built site improvement plans
- Restrict driveways on prominent landforms
Multiple Strategies

- Promote new economic opportunities on larger acreages
  - Entertainment events — challenges with bldg. code compliance, access, parking, noise
  - Agricultural production — farmers markets and roadside stands, value-added processing
  - Hay sales, imported
  - Event centers
Lessons Learned

- Long range planning matters
- Creeping regulatory complexity can kill
- If it looks, walks, and quacks like a duck, it is a duck
- Rural is more a state of mind, not a density
- Solutions demand multiple, coordinated strategies
Teton County/MelodyRanch: Rise of the NIMBYs

- 90% built out
- Auto-centricity reinforced: new residents resist scheduled buses
- Residents oppose commercial services
- Rise of the NIMBYs: Melody Ranch residents oppose and help defeat two development proposals to the west
Teton County—Natural Resources Overlay

- Substantial acreage preserved for wildlife habitat, but no population data

- Best way to process? Expert analysis & procedural review vs. qualitative analysis by county experts

- Site specific analysis (landowner concerns) vs. landscape scale (neighbor concerns)

- Success at site / project level, but verdict not in on landscape scale
Teton County: Scenic Resources Overlay—Lots To Do About BERMS

- Successful at project/site and landscape level
- Good job at protecting skylines
- Difficulty in applying the foregrounding standards
- Significant time spent discussing berms
Teton County - New Projects Under SRO

Shooting Star golf course and cabins — berms under construction
Teton County - New Projects Under NRO

South Park Loop Road, Three Creek Ranch Golf Club with a private Cutthroat fly-fishing sanctuary
Teton County Lessons Learned

- Lock in desired outcomes as early as possible—political dynamics change as new residents settle in.
- Need population data to evaluate success of wildlife protection regulations.
- Landscape scale remains the most challenging.
- Greater clarity on desired outcomes for foregrounding treatments (berm issue).
Santa Fe County, NM: Rancho Viejo

- **The Place**
  - High desert—piñon and sage
  - Economy: tourism, government, second homes

- **New Ruralism:**
  - Alternative To Sprawl—Defined growth areas
  - Mixed Use
  - Open Space With Connections
  - Traditional Design/Landscaping
  - Transportation Options
Noteworthy Features
Measuring Success And Lessons Learned

- Popular residential area--variety of housing prices and types
- Attractive design and water-conserving landscaping
- Mixed success with interior mixed development
- Infrastructure breakdown--traffic and water/sewage
- Most county growth in Community College District
Measuring Success And Lessons Learned

- Successful open space and trails and inclusionary housing standards included in new code
- 2010/15 Sustainable GMP incorporates key elements of CCD: compact, amenities, mixed-use, housing mix
- Urban growth boundary and proposed code too inflexible—already growth in rural areas.
- ETC: TDRs and Tea Parties
Castle Rock, CO: Ridgeline Protection
Castle Rock, Colorado

- Small town on edge of booming Denver metro area
  - Interstate access
  - Outlet mall
  - Attractive western landscape
Castle Rock, Colorado

- Ridgeline/Skyline Protection
  - Computer view simulations from 232 viewing platforms
  - 3 Skyline subareas defined
  - No-build areas, height limits, and controls on roof colors/materials
  - Tree planting requirements
Measuring Success/Lessons Learned

- View maps helped shape new development layout
- Key ridges protected as open space set asides or parks
- Tree planting critical—also helped soften development that had vested rights
- Variance requests based on use of weather balloons helped fine tune administration
Measuring Success/Lessons Learned

- Regs needed adjusting for commercial areas, signage, etc.
- Some gaps between planning and building/zoning
- No guidebook for colors/materials
- Tree-planting requirement challenging on small lots
True West Implementation

To plan is heavenly... to implement divine
“In the West, a six-shooter and a smile are sometimes more persuasive than a smile alone.” - Teddy Roosevelt
EXOTIC TOOLS YET TO BE TESTED

NUCLEAR BUFFALO GRASS TO SCREEN DEVELOPMENT
Key Questions

Where did the original homesteaders or Native Americans build?

What architectural features and site elements like fencing are distinctive?

What building materials were used?

How wide are the streets in the center of town and in old neighborhoods?

What role did public spaces and parks play in focusing community life?

What are the traditional building setbacks and heights?

How did these elements work together to form the character of your community?

How does the town relate to the river? The railroad?
TRUE WEST: TO BE CONTINUED!!