Quality of Life in Boulder County 2000
A Community Indicators Report
The Boulder County Civic Forum (formerly the Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative) was launched in 1995 “to promote healthy decision-making that will sustain the environmental quality, livability, and economic vibrancy of the Boulder County region.”

The Boulder County Civic Forum:
• Articulates a vision for healthy communities
• Measures our progress through a Community Indicators Report
• Informs and educates the general public about issues of interest and concern
• Identifies opportunities for strategic action
• Convenes strategic partnerships to address key issues
• Assesses the impact of these actions

The 2000 Quality of Life in Boulder County Community Indicators Report is a follow-up to the first edition, which was released in 1998. As before, this Report attempts to measure our progress toward—or away from—a vision of healthy communities that was originally defined through an extensive two-year community outreach process. This vision describes community sustainability from four inter-related perspectives:
• People
• Environment
• Economy
• Culture & Society

This comprehensive view—along with its unique role as a non-partisan, non-governmental entity—enables the Boulder County Civic Forum to “shed light rather than heat” on complex community issues, many of which cross over the narrow limits of traditional issue advocacy and geopolitical boundaries. In this context, the Community Indicators Report is intended to be a useful information resource and planning tool for public officials, business leaders, grantmakers, community organizations, and the general public.
The 2000 Community Indicators Report

“Impacts of Growth on Quality of Life”

Focus on Issues

In addition to monitoring data trends, the 2000 Community Indicators Report identifies particular issues of concern that warrant further research, community dialogue, and comprehensive action. We wanted to know how the issues reflected in the Indicators data actually affect people in their daily lives, and which issues they care about most deeply. To accomplish this we reviewed opinion surveys conducted by various entities, consulted with a wide range of community and business leaders, and convened a series of community “focus group” conversations.

As a result of this process, we adopted “Impacts of Growth on Quality of Life” as the overarching theme of this year’s Community Indicators Report. In addition, four issues emerged as urgent priorities:

- Affordability
- Youth development
- Building a “sense of community”
- Regionalism and regional cooperation

Printed and On-Line Reports

This year’s report uses a combination of electronic and print media to present its findings:

- A four-page Executive Summary is available for broad distribution in the form of a quarterly Boulder County Civic Forum Newsletter.
- The Community Indicators Report provides an overview of the findings of our Indicators research and describes the issues we have identified for further action.
- The the Boulder County Civic Forum web site (www.bococivicforum.org) contains the entire database of Community Indicators research, as well as reference documents and links to other online data sources.

Revised Indicator Data

In January 2000 we convened an “Indicators Work Group” made up of volunteers representing environmental, business, and public health organizations, as well as private citizens. This group assessed the 1998 Indicators according to four criteria:

- Validity - Does the indicator provide meaningful information about what is being measured?
- Accessibility - Are the data available?
- Understandability - Can the indicator be easily understood by the general public?
- Reliability - Can the indicator be consistently measured over time?

We also challenged the group to consider potential new data points in response to several proposed enhancements to the Indicators document:

- Providing data on a community-by-community as well as a County-wide basis
- Comparing local indicators to similar data from “peer communities”
- Measuring the indicators against benchmarks or targets
- “Mapping” data to show trends among Boulder County communities
- Including “what-you-can-do” suggestions for action

As a result of this process, some of the original indicators were dropped in favor of new ones. For example, the “People” section now includes several indicators that are more consistent with standard measures of public health, allowing easier comparison with peer communities. See our web site for a complete view of the Indicators data. Throughout this Report, where specific Indicator data from our web site is referred to, the relevant Indicator number is noted as follows: (Indicator #...)

We are essentially rebuilding L.A. here. 2, 3 or 4% annual growth used to provide economic dynamism without a lot of environmental impacts. But we still need that drug of 2% or 3% growth to keep the economy going, while the environmental and social load gets heavier and heavier. We haven’t figured out how to keep a healthy economy without creating an unlivable situation.

— Tom Mayer
City Councilman, Louisville
Boulder County has long been known for its natural beauty, active outdoor lifestyles, and diverse array of communities that offer an appealing blend of small-town atmosphere and big-city amenities. A tradition of active citizen involvement and innovative local government has enabled us to preserve many of these desirable features, even in the face of tremendous growth and change. On the whole, Boulder County residents continue to feel that the quality of life here is very good.¹

Yet many people in Boulder County are now asking whether we can sustain our high quality of life as rapid growth continues. Indeed, the 1999 Boulder Regional Economic Analysis identifies quality of life as a “critical asset” to our ongoing economic prosperity. It concludes that “quality of life is viewed as the golden goose that is in danger of being killed by the rapid pace of economic growth and its subsequent ramifications.”

The Boulder County Civic Forum Community Indicators research shows that our quality of life has been enhanced in some ways, but diminished in others as our communities have undergone significant change in recent years. A brief summary of trends being monitored by the Boulder County Civic Forum and other community groups follows.
People

Population Growth
Since 1990 our population has grown from about 226,000 to an estimated 286,000—an increase of about 60,000 people, or nearly 27%. It is estimated that our population will increase by another 50,000 by 2010, and by about 100,000 by 2020. (Indicator #5) Domestic migration accounted for 48% of our population increase over the past decade. Another 13% came from international migration, and the remaining 39% from natural increase (births minus deaths).

Juvenile Crime
As noted in the 1999 report entitled YouthNET: Community Strategies for Youth Development and Violence Prevention, the juvenile arrest rate for property crimes in Boulder County exceeded the state rate every year from 1992–1997. The arrest rate for violent crimes was higher than the state rate from 1995 to 1997 (1997 is the last year for which data is available). (Indicator #27)

Aging Services “Agenda for Action”
Based on extensive surveys and demographic research, the Boulder County Aging Advisory Council has identified four priorities for action to enhance the lives of our elderly population:
- Caregiving: support for the 4,600 adults age 55 and over who care for another older adult, 60% of whom report emotional health concerns
- Emotional Health: formal and informal supports for all seniors, but especially for the 13% who report fair to poor emotional well-being, and the 23% who report problems with loneliness and isolation
- Physical Health: shifting the focus from illness to prevention and wellness, and improving access to care for low-income, multicultural, frail, and isolated elderly
- Prescription Medications: providing better information and accountability to reduce the 39% of seniors who misuse medications

Public Health Concerns
While Boulder County residents are generally pretty healthy, the Boulder County Health Department lists its top three concerns as:
- Alcohol abuse by both adults and youth, and increasing use of tobacco among youth (Indicators #19 and #20)
- Elevated rates of prostate and breast cancer (Indicator #16)
- Significant health disparities based upon race, ethnicity, income, age, sexual orientation, and education

Human Services Priorities
Boulder County United Way, Boulder County Civic Forum, and several other local agencies recently commissioned an Assessment of Human Services Needs and Assets. Surveys of human service agency directors and front-line staff, clients, low-income people, and other key informants revealed strengths in two main areas:
- Short-term domestic violence services such as shelter and crisis counseling
- Emergency/basic needs such as food and shelter

Major areas of need were identified as:
- Health care, especially preventive and dental
- Affordable housing
- Long-term and transitional services
- Services to non-English-speaking populations
Environment

Acreage Developed
In order to accommodate the influx of people to Boulder County, municipalities have annexed a total of 38 square miles of land for development since 1980, increasing the total land area of Boulder County’s cities and towns by about 44%\(^1\). Longmont’s land area has grown the fastest, having annexed about 8.1 square miles during that time. In addition, 27,000 acres of agricultural land—about 17.4%—were taken out of production between 1987 and 1997\(^2\).

Open Space and Other Amenities
At the same time, growth in development and sales tax revenues has enabled County and municipal governments to secure more than 90,000 acres of open space for permanent preservation\(^3\). This revenue stream has also provided new libraries, parks, recreation centers, improved roads, and other amenities.

Traffic & Air Quality Concerns
The growth in the number of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) annually on County roads continues to outpace population growth\(^4\), meaning that not only are there more cars, as reflected in automobile registration numbers, but people are driving them more. This has made it more difficult to reach the clean air standards set by the EPA for the Denver metro area.

Water Imports
Since the late 1950s, about a third of Boulder County’s water has come from west of the Continental Divide via the Colorado-Big Thompson (C-BT) water diversion project\(^5\). Back then, approximately 98% of imported water was used for agriculture, with just 2% going to municipal (i.e., residential and industrial) uses. Today, municipal uses claim approximately 35% of water imports, and total water usage has increased along with population growth. Our dependence on costly imported water raises questions about economic and environmental sustainability as we anticipate continued growth in the years to come.

Air Quality
Air quality in our region has improved over the past decade as the levels of carbon monoxide (CO) and particulate matter (PM-10) have been reduced. As a result, Pollutant Standard Index (PSI) ratings have consistently been “good” or “moderate.” On the other hand, concern is growing about levels of ground-level ozone (O\(_3\)) during the summer months. The Colorado Air Pollution Control Division issued more than twenty ozone action alerts in each of the past two years. Besides the inherent health risks, we face the prospect of costly federal requirements and possible penalties, if we violate the new federal air pollution standard for ozone.
Economy

Job & Wage Growth

The number of jobs in Boulder County has increased even faster than the population—40% between 1990 and 1998. While many of these are well-paying jobs, leading to an increase in average wages paid, significant growth has also occurred in lower-paying sectors such as retail and services. This is reflected in the fact that median family income is growing much more slowly than per capita income.

Jobs/Housing Imbalance

With the number of jobs in Boulder County increasing so much faster than the population, some of our communities are being transformed from “bedroom” communities to employment centers. For example, it is estimated that about 47,000 people commute daily into Boulder from surrounding areas, while 24,000 commute out. This is a major contributor to the increase in VMT and rush-hour traffic congestion.

Increasing Housing Prices

Between 1990 and 1999, the median sale price of a single-family home in Boulder County more than doubled, rising from about $110,000 to $223,806. Prices have risen fastest in areas that were once among the most affordable, including mountain towns, Lafayette, Longmont, and Erie. In other words, the boom in housing prices is now a County-wide phenomenon. (See below, Section III, “Issues of Concern: Challenges and Opportunities” for a more detailed description of the increasing cost of housing and its impact on our communities.)

Don’t get me wrong—prosperity is great. But I worry about how the community is changing as far as my kids’ expectations are concerned. My daughter’s friends all went to Europe or Hawaii for spring break. Nobody went to Grandma’s house and played in her yard. I think it’s especially hard for children of color—most of them don’t come from these affluent homes.

—Ann Cooper
Realtor, Boulder
Changing Schools

The character of public education is changing rapidly. Families can now choose among traditional neighborhood schools, district-run focus schools, quasi-independent charter schools, and private schools. Some schools are overcrowded, because districts can’t build fast enough to keep up with population growth, while others have been closed or consolidated. This phenomenon may also contribute to increased traffic and VMT, as people may now live in one community, work in another, drive their children to school in a third, and then shop somewhere else. ( Indicator #33)

Educational Achievement

Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley standardized test scores remain high compared to state and national averages. ( Indicator #47) Graduation rates are higher and dropout rates lower than statewide averages. Yet significant disparities persist between rates for students of color and white students. ( Indicators #45 and #46) For example, while the graduation rate for White students in Boulder Valley schools is 87%, the rate for Hispanic students is only 58%; in St. Vrain Valley the rates are 94% and 71% respectively (see below, Section III, “Issues of Concern: Challenges and Opportunities”).

I personally feel enriched by the immigration of different folks here—Mexican immigrants, Russian immigrants, all of them. I feel it’s been a good thing for our community. It’s made us more culturally diverse, and nudged people to expand their world-view a little bit. I like that.
— Edwina Salazar-Waldrip
Director, OUR Center, Longmont

Changing Demographics

Boulder County is becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse. Both the Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley school districts report increasing numbers and percentages of students who speak English as a second language. ( Indicator #6) US Census estimates also reflect an increase in non-white populations. While Boulder County’s white/non-Hispanic population grew by about 20% between 1990 and 1999, the number of Asian/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and those of Hispanic origin grew at a much faster rate. ( Indicator #2)

Arts & Culture

According to a 1999 survey by the Knight Foundation, Boulder County has more arts organizations per 10,000 residents than either the state or the nation. ( Indicator #50) And residents appear to value these resources: 87% of respondents reported that they had attended an arts or cultural event in the preceding year, and 20% said that they had volunteered for an arts or cultural organization. At the same time, local arts organizations tend to have much lower assets per capita ($27) than Colorado ($66) or the U.S. ($147), which could be indicative of a less stable arts sector than in other communities.
Issues of Concern:
Challenges and Opportunities

Gathering data is one way to assess changes in our communities. Another way is to ask people what changes they have observed and how they have been affected personally. The Boulder County Civic Forum used both approaches to develop the 2000 Community Indicators Report. Four issues emerged from this process as urgent priorities that warrant further research, community dialogue, and comprehensive action. These issues, listed below and explored in depth in this report, will become the focus for the Boulder County Civic Forum’s activities for the coming year:

• Affordability
• Child & Youth Development
• Social Capital (a “Sense of Community”)
• Regionalism

The Boulder County Civic Forum has chosen to focus on these issues for the following reasons:

• They are current problems or negative trends that, if left unchecked, threaten to significantly diminish our County’s quality of life.
• They represent “top-of-mind” concerns across a broad spectrum of Boulder County residents. Good work is already being done in many of these areas, and people are motivated to work on them.
• They are comprehensive, crossing over the narrow limits of traditional “issue advocacy” and geopolitical boundaries, and interacting with all four of the Boulder County Civic Forum’s focus areas: People, Environment, Economy, and Culture & Society.
• They call for significant collaboration and partnerships among all sectors of the community, including government, business, non-profit and philanthropic organizations, and citizens.
• They will continue the momentum of the Boulder County Civic Forum activities that are already under way.

As a mother of a 9-year-old and a surrogate mom of 340 teenagers I’m very conscious of kids. The traditional nuclear family no longer exists, and parents are really struggling. We all live with the huge consequences of it. It’s as daunting as any of the other tasks for the community—helping people become better parents and making sure that kids have something positive happening in their lives.

— Rona Wilensky
Principal, New Vista High School, Boulder

When I started at the Sheriff’s Office 27 years ago everybody in the office lived in Boulder County. Today the majority live somewhere else. The problem is that the best quality public safety service comes from people who live in the community they serve. They join the PTA and read the local paper—they understand the issues the community is dealing with.

— George Epp
Boulder County Sheriff
Housing prices are rising much faster than incomes throughout Boulder County. This has led to increased traffic congestion as the distance grows between where jobs are located and where workers are able to find affordable housing. This disparity also creates important social challenges for communities as the distance grows between “haves” and “have-nots.”

Successes: A Healthy Economic Climate

There is no question that Boulder County’s economy is very healthy. Unemployment is low, and many good new jobs have been created in recent years. Our region often appears on national “top ten” lists for measures such as venture capital investment and successful business startups. The engine for much of this growth has been so-called “new economy” industries such as technology, telecommunications, and biotechnology.

The average wage paid by local employers is increasing as well, due both to a tight labor market and to the fact that technology-oriented industries tend to pay higher wages. As a result, Boulder County’s per capita income has been rising steadily, faster than much of Colorado and the nation.22 (Indicator #39)

Challenges

Alongside the growth in technology-oriented jobs, our local economy has also seen a significant increase in the number of jobs in lower-paying sectors of the economy, such as retail, non-computer-related services, and some manufacturing jobs. Overall, incomes are growing faster for those at the upper end of the wage scale than for those at the lower end. This is reflected in the fact that median family income is rising more slowly than per capita income. A growing divide may be developing between those with higher and lower incomes, with fewer families in the middle.

Skyrocketing Housing Costs

One of the most far-reaching impacts of growth on our quality of life is the dramatic increase in housing costs. There are many reasons for this. More higher-paying jobs, a strong national economy, and, again, our attractive quality of life have all contributed to increased demand for housing in general, and a strong market for more expensive housing in particular. While some communities have been annexing land and building new homes at a steady rate, others have adopted more restrictive growth policies limiting the supply of new housing units. In addition, much of the new construction in Boulder County consists of larger, more expensive homes.

The result: while median family income in Boulder County has grown by 71% in the past ten years, the median sales price of a single-family home has more than doubled, rising 113%. (Indicator #43) Prices for condos and town homes have risen even faster, increasing by 132%. The most expensive place to live is unincorporated Boulder County, where the median price of a single family home is about $358,000. Boulder remains the most expensive municipality, with a median price of $345,000, while Longmont continues to be the most affordable at $198,000.

It is important to note that over the past five years prices have risen fastest in those areas that were once among the most affordable, including:

- Jamestown, Nederland, Niwot, and Ward (aggregated)—52% increase
- Lafayette—46% increase
- Erie—38% increase

In summary, the problem of high housing costs now includes all housing types and all Boulder County communities. Eastern Boulder County no longer provides as much of the stock of affordable housing for Boulder County’s workforce as it once did. That inventory is increasingly found in surrounding communities in Larimer, Weld, Adams, and Jefferson Counties.
Impacts of Increased Housing Prices

For those who already own a home here, the increase in housing prices is good news insofar as the value of their investment—often a family's single largest asset—continues to grow. But for those who are relocating here and for first-time homebuyers, it means that buying a home requires an ever-greater financial sacrifice, with limited choices in the types of housing that they can afford.

This can be a particular hardship for those who work in the lower-paying jobs that are vital to sustaining a good economy and a good quality of life for everyone, including:

- “Essential workers” in law enforcement, fire departments, hospitals, and utilities
- Retail and service industry workers
- Entry-level professionals
- Teachers and child care workers
- People who work in non-profit community organizations
- Artists, musicians, and writers

This phenomenon has the potential to fundamentally alter the character of our communities. Many effects are already noticeable. In one of the Community Indicators focus groups, for example, a long-time mountain resident observed that two of the homes in her neighborhood were recently purchased as vacation homes for out-of-state residents. Others noted that their grown children cannot afford to live in their own hometown. Some were concerned that we may be creating two-tiered communities with wealthy residents on the one hand, and non-resident workers on the other, who must commute daily from other communities that offer affordable housing—a pattern often found in resort communities such as Aspen and Vail.

Businesses, too, recognize that it is difficult to attract and retain employees if they can’t afford to live within a reasonable distance from their jobs. A recent survey of 198 local employers by the City of Boulder,17 for example, found that 22% of them considered housing a “major problem,” and another 75% considered it a “minor problem.” Only 3% said it was “not a problem.” The lack of diversity in housing prices in Boulder County communities has environmental consequences as well. As the 1999 Regional Economic Analysis notes, “longer commuting times and distances may thwart efforts to improve air quality in our region.” And, as noted above, per capita “vehicle miles traveled” are indeed increasing.

Boulder County “Affordable Wage”

To monitor the issue of affordability, the Boulder County Civic Forum has estimated an “affordable wage,” or the basic income needed to maintain a more or less average lifestyle in Boulder County communities for households of various sizes and types. (Indicator #44) These include a single adult; a single parent with one child; a single parent with two children; and a two-parent, two-child family. The formula is based on average and median costs, in an attempt to give a “ballpark” figure in order to enhance public discussion of these issues; it is not intended to portray a minimum or subsistence income24.

Please note that these figures do not include any savings for retirement or education, or the cash needed to make a down payment for a home purchase.

The estimates, modeled on a similar study conducted in Durango by Operation Healthy Communities, are based on three factors25:

1. Basic Budget: Annual living expenses were derived from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics biennial Consumer Expenditure Survey. This is an average of actual expenses incurred by households throughout the country for goods and services such as food, clothing, automobiles, and utilities. We adjusted these figures by applying the Boulder-Greeley Consumer Price Index. This number includes the cost of health care and health insurance, so it could be reduced if health insurance were provided by an employer.

2. Housing Costs: These figures were obtained from the Metro Denver Apartment Association’s 1999 rent survey and the Multiple Listing Service. Apartment rents were used to calculate housing costs for one-, two-, and three-person households; current median home sales prices were used for three- and four-person households.

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## Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative
### 2000 Affordable Wage Calculations

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<td>$37,574</td>
<td>$43,416</td>
<td>$51,974</td>
<td>$63,640</td>
<td>$71,614</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUSPPRED:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Budget</td>
<td>$13,423</td>
<td>$19,986</td>
<td>$19,986</td>
<td>$23,208</td>
<td>$23,208</td>
<td>$31,182</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Costs</td>
<td>$8,902</td>
<td>$10,117</td>
<td>$14,587</td>
<td>$13,437</td>
<td>$18,107</td>
<td>$18,107</td>
<td>$18,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Costs</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$7,500</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livable Wage (hourly)</td>
<td>$10.73</td>
<td>$6,900</td>
<td>$6,900</td>
<td>$13,800</td>
<td>$13,800</td>
<td>$13,800</td>
<td>$13,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livable Wage (annual)</td>
<td>$22,146</td>
<td>$37,574</td>
<td>$43,416</td>
<td>$51,974</td>
<td>$63,640</td>
<td>$71,614</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We further refined the median sale price figure by taking 90% of the median of prices for two-bedroom/two-bath homes for a single parent with two children, and three-bedroom/two-bath homes for a family of four. These costs would be lower for those who purchased homes prior to 2000.

3. Child Care Expenses: Child care costs are provided by the City of Boulder Children's Services Division's annual survey of child care costs throughout Boulder County. The figure used in the table is an average of fees charged for infant, pre-school, and school-age care. It assumes all children in the household require full-time care. The figure would be less for those who do not need full-time child care or who can rely on family members or neighbors to provide care.

### Opportunities for Action

Boulder County communities are working to provide a variety of affordable housing solutions. The Boulder County Commissioners Office estimates that 2,925 units of subsidized “permanently affordable” housing currently exist in Boulder County, and another 388 are under construction. In addition, 1,899 Section 8 housing vouchers (a federal housing subsidy program) are currently being used by County residents, for a total of 4,824 subsidized units. Additional work needs to be done to assess the capacity of the countywide supply of affordable housing to meet current and future needs.

The Boulder County Civic Forum will continue to monitor the broader social, economic, and environmental impacts of the affordability issue in our communities. We will encourage strategic partnerships that bring together public officials, business leaders, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, and neighborhood leaders to accomplish the following objectives:

- Educate and engage a broad spectrum of citizens in affordability issues and potential solutions.
- Encourage business leaders to support the construction and acquisition of affordable housing units through the process of public hearings and approvals.
- Encourage businesses to explore employer-assisted housing options.
- Coordinate and collaborate with neighboring communities and counties to address the ongoing regional problem of a jobs/housing imbalance.
Child & Youth Development

Summary

A traditional Masai greeting asks, “How are the children?” In Boulder County, they’re doing great overall. But there are some disturbing trends: a significant gap in graduation rates between Hispanic and other students; (Indicator #45) juvenile crime rates that exceed state averages; (Indicator #22) and the challenge of finding quality, affordable child care. (Indicator #15) Another well-known African proverb says, “It takes an entire village to raise a child.” Families, neighbors, schools, community groups, and businesses all have an important role to play.

Successes

Young people in Boulder County generally fare reasonably well. Standardized test scores and graduation rates exceed state and national averages, as expected in well-educated, higher-income communities such as ours. Boulder County also has a strong history of coordination and collaboration between youth-serving agencies, including law enforcement, juvenile justice, mental health, public health, government agencies, non-profit community organizations, and schools.

In addition, local programs and policies reflect a shared commitment to prevention and early intervention, and to asset-based rather than needs, or deficit-based approaches to serving children, youth, and families. Many of these programs have the financial support of their local communities through sources such as Boulder County and municipal governments, United Way, community foundations, and private donors in addition to state and federal grants.

I felt that a lot of kids had a more reasonable response to Columbine than a lot of adults. Kids see the realistic figures that school is still the safest place to be, that it was pretty much an isolated incident. Kids at my school were like, “yes, we have to address issues that come up because of cliques and have better relationships between adults and students.” I think that was a pretty good response.

— Nell Geiser
Boulder Youth Opportunities Advisory Board
Challenges

While most children and youths in Boulder County are capable and responsible, have a lot to offer their schools and communities, and have a bright future ahead of them, there are some troubling trends.

Drug, Tobacco, and Alcohol Use

Boulder County youths use drugs and alcohol at higher rates than national averages. This is even more true for Boulder Valley schools than St. Vrain Valley schools (Longmont and northeast Boulder County). The greatest differences are seen in self-reported use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and hallucinogens. (Indicator #19)

Problematic adult alcohol use is also more common in Boulder County than in Colorado as a whole. (Indicator #20) And as a state, Colorado leads the nation in the percentage of adults (especially those over 26) who smoke marijuana. This reinforces the notion that adolescent behavior and attitudes often mirror those of the adult society. One exception to this trend is that adults in Boulder County tend to use tobacco less than others in Colorado.

Educational Achievement and Graduation Rates

Students in both Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley schools score higher on standardized tests and are more likely to graduate than their statewide and national counterparts. However, Hispanic students in Boulder County do not fare nearly as well as others. For example, while the graduation rate for White students in Boulder Valley schools is 87%, it is only 58% for Hispanic students; in St. Vrain Valley the rates are 94% and 71% respectively. The State reported graduation rates of 84% for White students and 64% for Hispanic students in 1999.

Juvenile Crime Rates

The Boulder County Civic Forum’s 1999 report entitled YouthNET: Strategies for Youth Development and Violence Prevention reported that Boulder County juvenile arrest
rates for property crimes have exceeded state averages every year since 1992. Arrest rates for violent crimes have also exceeded state averages since 1995, with state rates declining while local rates have remained relatively stable32.

Child Care Cost, Quality, and Availability

Child care is an essential service for many working families, especially for single parents and for those seeking to make the transition from welfare to work. About 40% of all households with children in Boulder County either use child care (33%) or have a need for it but do not currently have it (6%)33. This represents an estimated total of 10,560 households either using or needing child care, or about 18,000 children.

Many families struggle to find child care that is affordable, of high quality, and available when and where they need it. Indeed, a high percentage of those who use and/or need child care rate the following as “big problems”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATED AS A “BIG PROBLEM”</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding affordable child care</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding well-trained child care providers</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding good quality child care</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding any child care</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding child care in a convenient location</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding child care for the hours I need it</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These concerns are shared by parents and early childhood education professionals all over the country. Child care workers struggle to provide the best possible care in a system that is burdened by low wages and high costs. There are few incentives for highly qualified, well-educated people to choose child care as a profession, even though research has shown that the early years of a child’s life are critically important to his or her ability to be successful later in life. Public investments to improve quality are very limited.

Opportunities for Action

Following the publication of YouthNET in April 1999, the Boulder County Civic Forum convened a group of local grantmakers to explore ways to coordinate and collaborate on funding youth-related programs County-wide. As a result, two pilot after-school programs for middle school students were funded, a “student union” at Burbank Middle School in Boulder, and “Homework Heroes” at Heritage Middle School in Longmont. Both programs combine academic support, a positive peer-oriented social environment, and community involvement.

Continuing our efforts, the Boulder County Civic Forum is now partnering with the Boulder County Human Services Coordinating Council and the Boulder Valley School District in supporting the implementation of a comprehensive, age-appropriate, skills-based health curriculum. This is a great opportunity to provide all students in the District with a basic set of healthy decision-making skills that will help reduce a number of problem behaviors, including drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and school dropouts.

A broad-based commitment from all sectors of the community is needed to ensure a positive future for children and youth in Boulder County. Businesses, community groups, charitable organizations, schools, and concerned individuals all have a role to play if we are to accomplish these important goals:

- Ensure the academic success of every child in our schools and close the achievement and graduation gap between Hispanic students and others.
- Provide a variety of fun and enriching activities for teens (especially middle school age) during out-of-school hours in both school- and community-based settings.
- Engage young people in real-life community planning and problem-solving opportunities.
- Provide comprehensive skills-based health education curriculum in all grades for every student in our schools.
- Strengthen our system of early childhood care and education to provide better access to quality, available, and affordable care.
Summary
Participants in Boulder County Civic Forum focus groups often voiced concerns about how the character of their neighborhood and community had changed, beyond the obvious addition of roads and buildings. They reflected a sense of loss of a familiar past and anxiety about an uncertain future. Many are seeking ways to revitalize an ethic of civility and shared responsibility for the common good of their neighbors as well as their neighborhoods.

Successes: Citizen Activism
Boulder County residents appreciate many things about our unique quality of life, especially the amenities afforded by our proximity to scenic natural areas. In the Boulder County Workforce Survey conducted by the Boulder Economic Council in 1999, for example, employees cited climate, recreation, and parks and open space as the three “quality-of-life factors” with which they were most satisfied.

Yet, while harder to measure, Boulder County residents also want to have a sense of small-town connectedness, belonging, and mutual responsibility between neighbors and fellow citizens. This can be felt in the pride that many residents express in our communities’ history of citizen activism and responsive local government, a record that—for better or worse—has earned a statewide and even national reputation.

Challenges
New Residents
In addition to all of the new roads, houses, and commercial buildings that have appeared in Boulder County in the past ten years, there are also about 60,000 more people living here. This growth has had a profound social impact on our communities. Beyond the challenge of creating and/or maintaining informal social networks in rapidly changing neighborhoods, this phenomenon also diminishes a sense of shared history and values, of what we care about and “how we do business.”

In each community, both the challenges and the responses are unique. Consider Superior, which sprang from a tiny enclave of 255 people to a virtually brand new town of 7,742. Or Erie, which has grown from a small farming community of 1,258 people to a suburb of 6,500. Even Longmont added 15,000 new residents in the past decade, nearly equivalent to the entire population of Louisville. (Indicator #5)

Social Capital: A “Sense of Community”

This activism has led to the development and preservation of many of the features of our communities that we value so highly—open space, creek paths, recreation centers, and mountain and grassland parks. Innovative approaches have also been developed to support the social and civic infrastructure of our communities, such as the City of Longmont’s fund supporting neighborhood-generated projects, the City of Boulder’s Neighborhood Liaison program, and various affordable housing initiatives.

Boulder County’s non-profit and human service agencies are leaders in identifying and advocating for the needs of our community members. New leadership is emerging from our nascent philanthropic sector, evidenced by the rapid growth of community foundations serving Longmont, Broomfield, and Boulder County.
Changing Leadership and Expectations
In some communities struggles have developed between an “old guard” of long-time civic leaders and a new generation of people with different values and expectations. Ironically, conflicts over a town’s future growth sometimes arise between those who have approved ambitious growth plans in the past and the people who have moved in as a result of those plans.

In other communities, disagreement is more about “how we live here.” Nederland residents, for example, speak of the tension between “old-timers,” who moved to the mountains to enjoy the isolation from neighbors, and “newcomers,” many of whom commute daily down the Canyon to work and who have more suburban expectations of community life. One typical bone of contention between these groups, for example, is whether to pave certain roads.

Cultural Diversity
Although Boulder County is often thought of as fairly homogeneous, there is in fact a wide diversity of cultures represented in our communities. Estimates of demographic trends show that while the total population of Boulder County increased by about 22% from 1990–1999, the number of non-White people increased by 48%. In addition, there has been significant immigration to Boulder from Eastern Europe. Our communities will continue to be challenged to incorporate people from diverse cultural backgrounds into the social, educational, and economic opportunities that others take for granted—and to welcome the gifts and assets that they bring. The Boulder County Latino Task Force is currently conducting a survey of the needs and assets of the Latino community, that will be released in 2001.

Opportunities for Action
In his book, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam refers to “social capital” as “ways in which our lives are made more productive by social ties.” Social capital consists of “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.” He demonstrates that social capital is strongly correlated with positive outcomes for individuals, neighborhoods, and communities in several arenas, including:

- Education and children’s welfare
- Safe and productive neighborhoods
- Health and happiness
- Democracy and civil society

Pointing to measures such as voter turnout, membership in civic organizations, religious participation, informal social connections, and voluntarism and philanthropy, Putnam also shows how social capital has precipitously declined in America since the mid-1960’s. He postulates a number of possible reasons for this, including urban sprawl, which has diminished our identification with “communities of place” as distances between home, work, school, and shopping increase—a persistent theme in this report.

Surveys on Social Capital and Philanthropy
The Boulder County Civic Forum and the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County are part of a national benchmark survey on social capital to be conducted in 33 communities around the country in the first quarter of 2001. The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, in partnership with the Boulder Daily Camera, recently conducted a similar survey of Boulder County residents’ habits regarding volunteering and charitable giving.

Information from these two surveys will help us to identify ways to strengthen social capital in Boulder County. Several local civic-minded organizations have already taken up this cause. For example, the Millennium Trust has chosen to focus this year’s grants on “building a sense of community” throughout the County. The Millennium Trust is an endowment fund housed at the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County that was created by donations from over 5,000 Boulder County residents who contributed the equivalent of their last hour’s wage in 1999 to build an endowment to benefit future generations.

More and more, people call the police when they don’t like what they hear or see in their neighborhoods. People don’t talk directly to their neighbors—they call the government and expect us to fix it. To me, it’s a symptom of isolation and anonymity. It also seems like the busy-ness of the town makes people less tolerant.

— Mike Butler
Chief of Police, Longmont

I used to know everyone on my street, but now I know very few of my neighbors. Everyone is just too busy, especially women who are trying to raise children. I think that creates a broader problem in terms of community involvement and leadership—women used to take a lot of responsibility for that.

— Dickey Lee Hullinghurst
Intergovernmental Relations Director, Boulder County Commissioners Office
Regionalism & Regional Cooperation

Summary

Most of the growth-related challenges that our communities face today transcend geopolitical boundaries. Environmental issues such as air and water quality are obvious examples. We all live downstream from one community and upstream from another. Boulder County communities have successfully cooperated in the past on complex issues such as land use planning and open space acquisition. By strengthening our identity as a County, we will be better prepared to tackle other regional challenges such as transportation, economic sustainability, and human services planning that impact social and civic life.

Successes: Intergovernmental Agreements

As Boulder County’s population has grown, local governments have found ways to cooperate with each other to achieve shared goals and address regional problems. In addition to improving informal communication and coordination, municipal and County governments have signed formal agreements regarding several important issues:

1. Preserving open space buffers between cities: To date, about 4,470 acres of open space in Boulder County have been preserved through intergovernmental agreements involving Boulder County government and the cities of Lafayette, Louisville, Broomfield, Erie, and Superior. Roughly 5,000 additional acres are being considered for possible joint purchases with these and other municipalities.

2. Identifying where future development will occur: Most Boulder County municipalities have disclosed their plans for future development by identifying “urban growth boundaries” and have agreed to consult with each other on the development of land that borders their neighbors’ “planning areas.” This will help prevent “surprise” annexations and ensure compatible uses on adjoining parcels.

3. Planning retail and commercial/industrial development: In a few instances, most notably Louisville and Superior, neighboring cities have jointly planned for retail and commercial/industrial development in adjacent areas. They share sales tax revenues generated from these developments.

4. Addressing traffic problems: As noted previously, the fact that job growth has outpaced population growth in Boulder County has contributed significantly to increased traffic congestion. One small step toward addressing this problem has been the cooperative development of inter-city “circulator” bus routes, such as the “Jump” between Boulder, Louisville, and Lafayette. A similar Boulder-Longmont route is in the planning stages.

Challenges: Competition vs. Cooperation

Unfortunately, state laws and market forces tend to promote competition rather than cooperation among communities. For example, each Colorado municipality must collect sales and other taxes from retail and commercial establishments in order to pay for the infrastructure costs of development (i.e., roads, power, water, sewer, etc.) and to provide amenities such as recreation centers, libraries, parks, and human services. This promotes a cycle of continued growth as well as competition between communities for resources such as water and retail sales tax revenues.

Public policy has amplified “bad blood” between communities. Most local public officials can recite a litany of real or perceived offenses committed against their town by a neighbor. In some cases this reaches back a hundred years or more! While they must always have their own community’s best interests in mind, community leaders can reap benefit from supporting regional interests, too. For example, the lack of affordable housing and surplus of jobs has had far-reaching impacts on traffic congestion. This is a challenge that requires regional solutions that will enhance quality of life for all Boulder County residents.
Opportunities for Action

One key to addressing the complex challenges that threaten our quality of life is to strengthen our identity as a County and region, while keeping the unique attributes of our local communities. The time has come to strengthen partnerships between business, local governments, non-profit agencies, charitable organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and private citizens in order to better understand and build upon those areas where interests converge. As this report has illustrated, issues of economic, environmental, social, and public health are all interconnected and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation from one another.

Energetic and sustained cross-sector regional collaboration is needed to:

- Address the imbalance between job growth and residential growth in local communities and across the County as a whole
- Create more options for affordable housing Countywide
- Improve transportation infrastructure and reduce dependence on single-occupancy automobiles
- Promote a sustainable economy, without requiring perpetual residential and commercial growth and competition between communities
- Plan for human services to meet the diverse needs of our families, children, youth, seniors, disabled, non-English-speaking people, and others
- Strengthen the social and civic infrastructure of our communities

I know a lot of people are unhappy with the way things are. Issues like transportation and school construction are huge—and they don’t usually get dealt with until there’s some kind of crisis. But on the positive side, we do have the ability to come together and figure it out. I’ve seen more of that happening, too.

— Mary Blue
RTD Board Member, Longmont

Endnotes

3. Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Demography Section www.dola.state.co.us.
5. Published by the Boulder County Civic Forum under its former name, Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative.
6. Colorado Bureau of Investigation www.cdpweb.state.co.us/.
8. Chuck Stout, Executive Director, Boulder County Health Department: personal communication.
11. Boulder County Land Use Department www.co.boulder.co.us/lu.
12. Boulder County Land Use Department: City of Boulder Open Space Department.
15. Environmental Protection Agency www.epa.gov; Regional Air Quality Council www.raqc.org; Boulder County Health Department www.co.boulder.co.us/health.
23. Boulder County Assessor’s Office.
24. For comparison, see the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute www.co.fiscalpolicyinst.org, Colorado Family Needs Budget (September 2000).
25. For detailed information about each of these data sets, please see the Boulder County Civic Forum web site www.bccivicforum.org.
29. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment www.cdpsweb.state.co.us/.
30. Published under the Boulder County Civic Forum’s former name, Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative.
32. Published by the Boulder County Civic Forum under its former name, Boulder County Healthy Communities Initiative.
33. Colorado Bureau of Investigation www.cdpweb.state.co.us/.
34. City of Boulder Children’s Services Division and National Research Center, Boulder County Child Care Needs Assessment (April 2000).
35. Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Demography Section www.dola.state.co.us.
Resources

In addition to sources cited in footnotes, the reader may find the following documents useful for further information.

- Boulder County Aging Services Division, Survey of Strengths and Needs of Older Adults in Boulder County, J une 1999.
- Boulder County Aging Services Division, Boulder County Older Adult Health & Lifestyle Survey, J une 1997.
- Boulder County Consortium of Cities, Traffic Jam, Fall 1999.
- Boulder County Department of Community Services, Community Needs Assessment for Boulder County and Longmont Head Start, October 1998.
- Boulder County Health Department, Unintended Pregnancy Among Young Adults in Boulder County: Focus Group Findings, April 1999.
- Boulder County Movement for Children (Boulder County Department of Community Services and City of Boulder Children's Services), The Status of Children in Boulder County in the 1990's: 2000 Report, October 2000.
- City of Boulder Children's Services Division, Economic Development Trends and Child Care Subsidies in Boulder County, April 2000.
- City of Boulder Department of Housing and Human Services, Boulder Housing Needs Assessment, 1999.
- City of Longmont, Growth and Open Space Survey: Report of Results, J une 2000.

Web Links:

- Boulder Area Sustainability Network (BASIN): www.basin.org
- Boulder Chamber of Commerce chamber.boulderco.us/front.html
- Boulder Community Network: bcn.boulderco.us
- Boulder County: www.co.boulderco.us
- Boulder County - GrowthWatch www.co.boulderco.us/lu/growthwatch
- Boulder County Aging Services www.co.boulderco.us/cb/age/index
- Boulder County Health Department www.co.boulderco.us/health.main.htm
- Boulder County Transportation Department www.co.boulderco.us/transportation
- Boulder County United Way www.unitedwaybouldercounty.org/
- Boulder Energy Conservation Center (BECC) (PACE Program) http://bcn.boulderco.us/environment/becc
- City of Boulder: www.ci.boulder.co.us
- City of Boulder Children's Services Division www.ci.boulder.co.us/cyfhs/children/cyf_child.htm
- City of Broomfield: www.ci.broomfield.co.us
- City of Lafayette: www.cityoflafayette.com
- City of Longmont: www.ci.longmont.co.us
- City of Louisville: www.ci.louisville.co.us
- Colorado Bureau of Investigation, Crime Information Center http://cdpsweb.state.co.us/cbi
- Colorado Child Welfare Services www.cdhs.state.co.us/cyf/cwelfare/cwweb.html
- Colorado Department of Agriculture www.ag.state.co.us/resource
- Colorado Department of Education: www.cde.state.co.us
- Colorado Department of Local Affairs Demography Section: www.dola.state.co.us
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment www.cdphe.state.co.us
- Colorado Division of Local Government, Demography Section http://dlg.oem2.state.co.us/demog/compcgh.htm
- Colorado Health Information Dataset Project: http://cohid.qen.co.us
- Colorado State Government: www.state.co.us
- Community Foundation Serving Boulder County www.commfound.org
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) www.drcog.org/index.htm
- Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov
- National Agricultural Statistics Service www.nass.usda.gov/co/
- Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District www.ncwcd.org
- Regional Air Quality Council (RAQC): www.raqc.org
- Town of Erie: www.ci.erie.co.us
- Town of Nederland: www.nederland.com
- Town of Superior: www.townofsuperior.com
- U.S. Census Bureau: www.census.gov
- U.S. Census Bureau - American Fact Finder http://factfinder.census.gov
- U.S. Department of Agriculture: www.usda.gov
- U.S. Dept. of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional.realis
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