

We're in this as a region. Let's plan like it.

Our region's elected officials recently sat down to talk about a reality that rarely makes the front page: how large-scale projects ripple outward long after they are approved.

When a major development creates hundreds of jobs in one community, the need for housing, water, roads, and public services does not stay neatly within town borders. It travels. It shows up downstream in Norwood, in Naturita and Nucla, and increasingly in Ouray, Dolores, and Montrose Counties. Too often, it lands in communities that had no real seat at the table when the project was first envisioned.

This is not a story of good towns and bad towns. The municipalities that host this growth and the communities that live with its effects both have something real at stake. Mountain Village and Telluride carry an enormous economic load for the entire region, and they cannot realistically house every worker inside their boundaries. The surrounding communities absorbing those workers face infrastructure costs alongside the benefits, and they deserve to weigh both with full information early, rather than learning about a major project years after its trajectory has already been set. Notice is not the same as a voice.

It was clear at the intergovernmental meeting that we are not as good as we should be at telling each other what is coming, and we are worse at deciding things together. Colorado law points toward a better way. The state encourages, though it does not require, local governments to enter into agreements with one another to plan growth, align goals, and even share revenue. The tool already exists; we simply have to pick it up.

And we would not be inventing anything. Our neighbors in Ouray County, the Town of Ridgway, and the City of Ouray recently used this exact framework, and this February, the state recognized them as the first region in Colorado to meet its housing goals this way, finishing ahead of schedule. If they can make that collaboration work, so can we.

Some worry that regional collaboration means surrendering local control or piling new hurdles onto the workforce housing we so desperately need. In practice, it means the opposite. When neighbors agree on the ground rules early, there are fewer surprises, fewer costly lawsuits, less long-term resentment, and an honest public accounting of who benefits and who pays.

The officials in that room said it plainly: we are in this as a region, and we need communication and outreach, not silos. Whether you live on the east end of the county or the west, you share the same county, the same watershed, and the same future. The county is uniquely positioned to lead this effort, taking a comprehensive look at the strain on our shared water, housing, and roads, rather than treating each project as if it stands alone.

Sharing what is coming is the easy part. The real work ahead is learning to plan it together.

Paul Reich