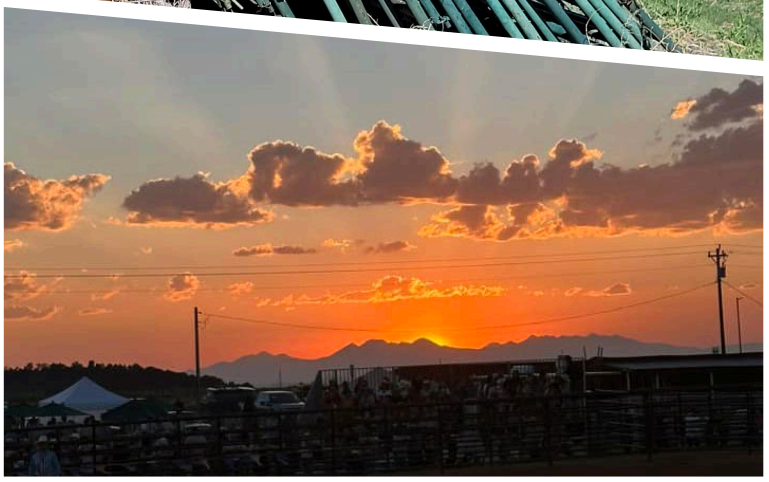










The West End
VISION PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JANUARY, 2026

West End Economic Development Corporation · Many Towns One Community

Town of Norwood Colorado 1905

Town Of Naturita

Town of Nucla Colorado

Nucla Naturita Area Chamber of Commerce

Norwood Chamber of Commerce Of Wright's Mesa

ABOUT THE WEST END & THE VISION PROJECT

The western portion of Montrose and San Miguel Counties, known as the West End, is a vast, rural, and scenic region nestled between the San Juan and La Sal Mountains. Its landscape is defined by agricultural mesas and valleys, deep sandstone canyons, and rivers. The West End includes the towns of Nucla, Naturita, and Norwood, along with four smaller unincorporated communities.

The West End's deep mining, tribal, and agricultural roots have shaped a close-knit community that is hard working and independent. In recent years, the region has faced major transitions: the loss of coal jobs and revenue, increasing tourism, pressure from nearby resort communities, and ongoing gaps in services, housing, and infrastructure.

Recognizing that they can be stronger together, local leaders from Towns of Naturita, Norwood, and Nucla, the West End Economic Development Corporation (WEEDC) and the Chambers of Commerce came together to ask: Where do we want to go as a region, and how do we get there together? This shared path forward has evolved into the West End Vision Project.

In the West End, our communities, economies, and futures are intertwined. Navigating the path ahead depends on working together and taking responsibility for shaping the future we want. Outside forces will always play a role, but our success will come from how we choose to respond: through thoughtful decisions and shared ownership. Creating a regional vision strengthens our ability to act, pursue funding, respond to pressures, expand access to jobs and housing, and support a strong economy.

The Vision Project set out to preserve what we love about the West End while providing clear direction, tools, and a unified voice for what comes next. Through collaboration and engagement, the process built shared understanding, strengthened partnerships, and translated community hopes and concerns into a practical framework for action.

The community's engagement shaped every phase of the project. From the first conversations to the final draft, residents, business owners, and local leaders defined the values, vision, strategies, and actions in this Plan, deepening community ownership and turning shared values into action.

We're proud to say WE Vision culminated in:

- 16 months of collaboration
- 710+ people engaged
- 50+ local volunteers across three guiding teams and five local action groups
- 120+ meetings
- 6 community dinners
- 5 shared community values
- 8 goals for the future
- 45 strategies to reach our goals
- 15 policy recommendations
- 16 potential project and tools





HOW TO USE THE VISION PLAN

This Executive Summary highlights the big picture: the values, goals, priorities, and strategies of the West End. The full Vision Plan offers deeper guidance, including potential policies, tools, and additional context. Local leaders, organizations, and partners can use the plan to:

- Check alignment when making decisions about development, services, & investments
- Coordinate across towns and counties
- Communicate shared priorities to funders and outside partners
- Stay focused on the long-term vision while taking practical next steps

OUR WEST END VALUES & VISION

Our Values represent who we are and what we care about most as a community. When issues become complex or divisive, these shared values offer a steady point of agreement for working through trade-offs.



1. SMALL TOWN SOLIDARITY: We value small-town neighborliness because it offers a sense of safety and pride. We may have different opinions and backgrounds, but we can set those aside and show up for each other when it matters. We celebrate our shared sense of community and want everyone to play a part in keeping the West End strong.



2. RURAL BY CHOICE: Rural, remote living isn't always easy, but we choose it for a reason: we value connection over urban conveniences, peace and quiet over crowds, and dark skies over city lights. Our West End way of life provides room to roam and a shared sigh of relief whenever we come home.



3. LIVING WITH THE LAND: We value our connection to the land and access to the outdoors. This land is a part of who we are and why we are here, from farms and open range to mineral rich mesas and rugged backcountry, all framed by a spectacular sky and sustained by the water it provides. We respect the land and how it contributes to our lives and we protect our right to live and work with it.



4. FOUNDATION FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE: We value the opportunity to build a good life in the West End. Even as we strive to sustain our rural way of life, we want to ensure people have access to good jobs, homes, and services so families, elders, and future generations can put down roots here and thrive.



5. CHARTING OUR OWN COURSE: We value being self-reliant and resourceful. We're proud of our community's history of grit and resilience in the face of challenges. Working together, we can carry forward that pioneering spirit and sense of possibility and build a future that is true to our values.

COMMUNITY GOALS: OUR VISION FOR THE WEST END IS...



A Vital and Viable Community



Balanced Use of Land and Resources



Housing Access and Choice



Pathways for Success



A Strong Regional Economy



Vibrant Community Character



Managed and Meaningful Growth



Civic Health and Collaboration

The full text of the goals and the accompanying strategies can be found on the following pages.

COMMUNITY GOALS & STRATEGIES

Strategies on the following pages list the specific approaches identified to achieve each goal. Those ✓**marked with a check have been identified as community priorities** to help focus early efforts.

GOAL 1: A VITAL AND VIABLE COMMUNITY

We have access to the healthcare, support, and services to stay here and live healthy, thriving lives.

The goal of a Vital and Viable Community is to ensure that all West End residents can rely on strong, accessible, and sustainable systems that support daily life, especially healthcare. The region's healthcare network is vital but under strain, and strategies focus on strengthening and expanding existing providers and services, diversifying funding, and expanding access to behavioral health and specialty care.

✓ 1. Diversify and increase funding and resources to strengthen, sustain, and expand local healthcare providers and services.
✓ 2. Improve access to essential physical and behavioral healthcare, specialists, and services.
✓ 3. Strengthen emergency and urgent care capacity, including paramedics, EMS, and emergency facilities. (Advancing a Critical Access Hospital and supporting first responders)
4. Provide more support, activities, care, and services for seniors to help them age in place.
5. Develop more avenues of support and wellbeing for young people outside of school.
6. Create more safe and easy ways to get to Main Streets, community centers, & service providers.
7. Ensure the whole community has access to healthy food options, prioritizing local food systems and solutions.

GOAL 2: HOUSING ACCESS AND CHOICE

We have safe, quality housing options, both new and restored, at prices that work for local incomes and allow people to stay in the community.

The West End community is focused on practical, community-led, collaborative solutions to address housing challenges. Efforts center on revitalizing vacant homes, making the most of existing infrastructure, and supporting smaller infill development. Care must be taken to cultivate a diverse, balanced housing market that keeps homes within reach for residents.

✓ 1. Formalize an organizational structure with dedicated staffing to provide consistent leadership, coordination, and support for ongoing housing work across the West End.
✓ 2. Create programs and opportunities to bring vacant and dilapidated homes, primarily in Nucla and Naturita, back into safe, livable condition and ensure upkeep of available housing.
✓ 3. Encourage a mix of new housing—including affordable, workforce, and market-rate options—so locals aren't displaced and people of all ages can find options that meet their needs. To limit displacement, new development should:
   - » Be designed and developed with local incomes
   - » Utilize creative approaches like sweat equity and buy-down programs to reduce costs
   - » Create and free up existing "naturally occurring" affordable housing
4. Update local regulations to allow and encourage desired housing types and prices.
5. Promote existing homeownership resources and education.

For more detail, data, tools, and context for these goals & strategies, check out the full length Vision Plan at: **bit.ly/WE-Vision-Plan**

GOAL 3: A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY

We benefit from a stable and diverse economy that allows a variety of local and new businesses, industries, and our workforce to thrive.

The West End is looking to build an economy of varied job opportunities in businesses that are rooted in place by local assets and ownership. This begins with supporting existing owners, and building a culture and opportunity for entrepreneurs and startups. It requires ongoing effort to make and advocate for development decisions that balance local benefits and impacts.

✓ 1. Identify and enable opportunities to grow local businesses and industries that create family-supporting jobs and reflect our community's identity and values.
   - » Develop local value-added agricultural products and facilities (the highest priority industry indicated in community engagement)

✓ 2. Enhance the reach and impact of programs and services that support growth of local small businesses and entrepreneurs.

3. Provide guidance for large-scale development projects to offset local impacts with local benefits. (Using tools such as intergovernmental and community benefits agreements)

4. Upgrade physical infrastructure to support businesses growth and attraction.

5. Invest in visitor attraction practices that help sustain local businesses and jobs year-round.

GOAL 4: MANAGED & MEANINGFUL GROWTH

We cultivate meaningful opportunities that contribute to livelihoods without compromising our rural character.

The community has expressed a strong desire for a practical, common-sense approach to managing growth: putting a few key policies in place to protect the community's rural character without over-regulating. The focus is on guiding development in a way that strengthens livelihoods, preserves local values and sense of place, and ensures growth happens where infrastructure and services can support it.

✓ 1. Develop policies and practices to protect key aspects of rural character including agricultural lands, local Main Streets, dark skies, and open spaces.

✓ 2. Ensure there are intentional policies and plans in place to manage or mitigate growth and development that is out of alignment with community character. Local priorities include:
   - » Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA) to align Town and County policies
   - » Regulate to prevent or limit large chain stores and "big-box" retail
   - » Limit or offset the impacts of luxury development & temporary workforce housing (man-camps)
   - » Limit the location of large-scale solar development on public lands

✓ 3. Ensure resources like water, infrastructure, and services can meet the needs of growth or have the capacity to expand accordingly.

4. Prioritize development opportunities that contribute to economic prosperity, access to services, and community vitality.

5. Encourage reuse and development on sites with existing utilities before expanding outward.

GOAL 5: BALANCED USE OF LAND AND RESOURCES

We have a locally-led balance between long-term stewardship of the land and shared use and access.

The West End community is deeply connected to the land and depends on it for work, recreation, and a sense of identity. As public land management grows more complex, the community seeks a stronger local role in shaping its future. This goal focuses on balancing access, conservation, and economic use, keeping public lands open and productive while protecting what makes the West End unique.

1. **Overarching:** Balance the following community-identified priorities for Public Lands:
   - Protect and sustain our public lands and natural resources through balanced, community-guided stewardship
   - Support legacy uses, livelihoods, and economic opportunity on public lands
   - Prioritize keeping West End public lands open, accessible, and multi-use
2. ✓ Form a Working Group that represents various local voices, perspectives, and leaders to explore what a "locally-led balance" looks like and how to make it happen.
3. ✓ With a unified local voice, coordinate and advocate with public lands entities to encourage more proactive local participation and influence.
4. ✓ Work together and collaborate across public lands user groups to identify land management "win-wins," opportunities to reduce friction points, and ways to build long-term land resilience and mutual benefit.
5. ✓ Provide additional opportunities for outdoor recreation on public lands and continue to provide education and resources to encourage respectful use.
6. Improve fire mitigation practices through collaboration and education.

GOAL 6: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

We have high-quality schools, libraries, and education that supports our teachers, students, and community of all ages and stages to succeed.

Strengthening schools, expanding learning pathways, aligning education with local opportunity, and supporting teachers and working families ensures that residents of all ages can see a future for themselves here, and that the community can grow and thrive from within.

1. Strengthen schools as community hubs at the heart of the community. Opportunities include:
   - » Build a new school in Norwood with improved opportunities such as emerging technologies, hands-on learning, and community connection
   - » Prioritize teacher support, competitive compensation, education, and retention
   - » Utilize schools as gathering spaces for community events
2. Expand pathways for students beyond college, including trades, apprenticeships, and work-study programs.
3. Partner with regional learning institutions to provide courses, training, and pathways to locally available jobs, especially in essential fields like healthcare and education.
   - » Project idea: Develop a vocational program that connects young adults to hands-on training in skills needed locally such as construction, healthcare, and trades.
4. Provide childcare and early childhood education opportunities to support working families.
5. Expand pathways for lifelong learning opportunities like job training and community classes.

GOAL 7: VIBRANT COMMUNITY CHARACTER

We enjoy safe, welcoming, and vibrant communities that celebrate our history and encourage shared participation and community pride.

Vibrant communities require ongoing care, participation, and connection. In the West End, this means supporting the people and places that bring us together: our main streets, gathering spaces, events, and local organizations. It also means making it easier for all residents, including newcomers and commuters, to get involved. With this focus we can maintain safe, welcoming, and enjoyable towns.

1. Foster a culture of participation, community connection, and volunteerism.
2. Welcome new community members by connecting them to local values, history, and opportunities to volunteer.
3. Make Main Streets and gathering places more attractive and enjoyable.
4. Encourage places of community gathering, events, and activities to bring people together.
5. Improve safety and pride by addressing vacant and/or run down properties, promoting community care and prevention, and beautifying community spaces.
6. Work to create more realistic pathways to participation and local engagement for West End commuters.

GOAL 8: CIVIC HEALTH AND COLLABORATION

We build trust, healthy dialogue, and strong, representative local leadership to keep the West End region engaged and effective.

Healthy civic life requires the community to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with one another to identify challenges and solutions. To realize the West End Vision, we need capable leaders who can model positive responses to differing opinions and allow the community to participate meaningfully in decision making. The West End has only so many individuals and resources; establishing structures for regular collaboration and developing new leaders is essential to maximize efficiency and impact.

1. Strengthen local Town leadership through training and enhanced collaboration across the three municipalities.
    - » Regional Leadership Team: Establish regular joint meetings for all Town local elected officials and at least one Commissioner from each County.
2. Cultivate effective local leaders and champions who represent the whole community.
3. Enhance community trust and understanding through transparent processes, respectful communication, and consistent application of adopted policies.
4. Enhance the effectiveness of local community organizations and reduce burnout.
5. Participate in County and regional government planning, budgeting, and decision processes so that the West End has a real voice in decisions that shape our future and is fairly supported.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION

The Implementation section of the Plan is about putting the community's vision into action, supporting funding and decision-making, and ultimately, keeping this tool off the shelf.

PUTTING VISION INTO ACTION

The Vision Plan sets the shared direction for our future, while its companion, the Action Plan spreadsheet, outlines the steps to get there.

- Vision Plan: Updated every 3–5 years through community check-ins.
- Action Plan: Updated every 6–12 months as partners complete tasks and identify next steps.

A 2026 read-only version is available online here; WEEDC maintains the working version so partners can coordinate and track progress. Reach out to learn about how you can contribute!

PARTNERS AND ROLES

Implementation of the Vision Plan will take teamwork. Each partner contributes to different aspects of community life and long-term success, and alignment across them is essential.

- **Towns:** Provide core services, maintain infrastructure, and make local land-use decisions that shape the community.
- **WEEDC:** Leads economic development, workforce, grants, and small-business support; serves as the regional lead for many strategies.
- **Counties:** Maintain major roads, oversee public health and emergency management, and guide development in unincorporated areas.
- **Chambers:** Promote local businesses, learning, and visitor activity that keeps money circulating locally.
- **Clinics:** Anchor health access and community stability, with expansion as capacity grows.
- **Water & Special Districts:** Manage critical water, sanitation, EMS, and fire services that aren't as easily provided by town governments.
- **Schools, Libraries, Education Partners:** Prepare youth, workers, and families through education and training and serve as community hubs.
- **Nonprofits:** Fill local gaps and provide essential social, recreational, youth, and senior services that sustain community life.
- **Regional & State Partners:** Bring funding, expertise, and coordination across health, economic development, and public lands.

A TOOL FOR DECISION-MAKING

More than 700 West End residents shaped this Vision. For local leaders, this broad engagement provides a community-backed framework for:

- **Clear, defensible basis for decisions:** Aligning policies, development approvals, and investments with an adopted plan reduces conflict, increases fairness, and supports consistent decision-making.
- **Shared direction:** When towns, counties, clinics, schools, and nonprofits use the same goals to guide their work, efforts reinforce rather than compete with each other.
- **A mandate for follow-through:** Because residents gave their time and trust to shape the Plan, leaders have a responsibility to use it as a compass and ensure community priorities guide day-to-day decisions.

FUNDING STRATEGIES

The Vision Plan strengthens local funding applications by showing:

- Broad community support
- Regional alignment vs. fragmented efforts
- Clear priorities linked to real needs
- Identified partners and roles
- A realistic path from idea to implementation

Successful funding efforts will require collaboration, the right lead applicant, strong letters of support, and a focus on projects that advance multiple goals at once. The Plan provides additional guidance and specific resources.

MEASURING PROGRESS

A plan is only effective if it's used. Tracking progress keeps it alive, visible, and relevant. The West End should focus on:

- Tracking Actions: A straightforward count of actions "in progress" and "completed."
- Check-Ins: Annual or biannual meetings to review progress and update next steps.
- Clear Communication: A simple dashboard, community updates, and an annual forum to celebrate wins and discuss emerging needs.
- Practical Metrics: A small set of simple indicators tied to housing, health, economy, and collaboration that are easy to maintain.