







2026 APA Colorado Planning Award Nomination
Projects with a Small Budget Award

Byers Subarea Plan

Byers, Colorado

ARAPAHOE COUNTY

BYERS SUBAREA PLAN
NOMINATION FOR APA COLORADO'S 2026 PROJECTS WITH A SMALL BUDGET AWARD

Nomination Information

Project Description:

The Byers Subarea Plan was unanimously approved on December 9, 2025, by the Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners as an amendment to the County's Comprehensive Plan. This Plan is an update of the 2003 Byers Sub-Area Plan and was developed with extensive community involvement. The updated Plan presents the community's vision, which has been translated into principles and policies that will guide land use and development decisions for the next 20 years.

Category: **Projects with a Small Budget**

Project Location: **Byers, Colorado**

Budget:

This plan was created by the staff of the Long Range Planning section of the Planning Division in the Arapahoe County Public Works and Development Department. No funds were used to retain a consultant. Expenditures consisted only of funds for food for the open houses.

Duration: 28 months

Project Website:

arapahoeco.gov/byersplan

Plan Document:

The Byers Subarea Plan consists of two documents; the Plan and Appendix A, which provides the history of the community.

Byers SAP_FINAL.pdf

ByersAppendixHistory.pdf

Award Contacts:

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Letters of Support:

I-70 Regional Economic Advancement Partnership (REAP)

Byers Park and Recreation District

Stacie May, May Farms

Projects with a Small Budget Award

Arapahoe County is nominating the Byers Subarea Plan for APA Colorado's 2026 Projects for a Small Budget award for developing an innovative approach to include and emphasize community sentiment in the plan. The plan merits consideration due to its community focus and the approach for the community's vision to be directly expressed in the plan.

Regional Context

The unincorporated community of Byers is located in eastern Arapahoe County, approximately 40 miles east of downtown Denver and 27 miles east of the intersection of E-470 and I-70.

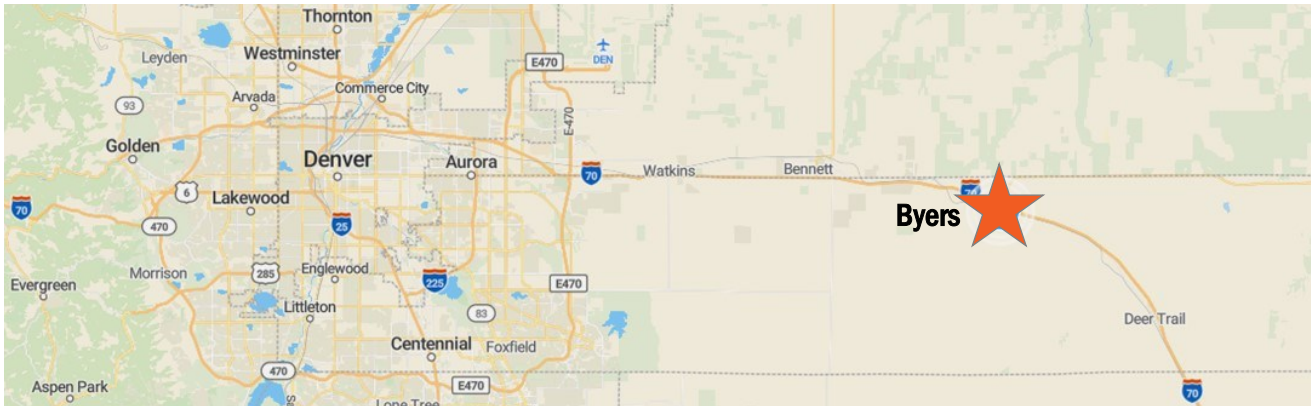
Byers straddles I-70 with the historic center of Byers, established residential areas, community facilities, and commercial uses south of I-70, and some residential and commercial uses on the north side of I-70. Other communities along the I-70 corridor include Strasburg and Bennett to the west and the town of Deer Trail to the east. Byers is well-connected to the region through I-70 and county roadways. In addition, Denver International Airport is approximately 35 miles from Byers, and the Colorado Air and Space Port is 20 miles away. Given its locational advantages and the continued growth of communities in the Denver region, it is expected that there will be an eastward expansion of urban areas along the I-70 corridor.

Established in 1889 as a farming and ranching community along the Kansas Pacific Railway, Byers has grown very slowly from a population of 168 in 1900 to 1,322 in 2020. Byers' rural and agricultural roots remain strong as its authentic small-town character is what makes the community special to its residents.

As an unincorporated community in Arapahoe County, planning and development review, transportation improvements and road maintenance, law enforcement, and other functions are carried out by the County.

History of Byers

As the planning process progressed, it became increasingly apparent that the Byers community's strong ties to the rural and small-town character of Byers were tied to its long history. Byers was first settled in 1866, and through interviews and tours of the community, County staff decided to use the plan to highlight Byers' long history. The result is Appendix A, Byers Historical Information, which is a compilation of research, family histories, and



Location of Byers in eastern Arapahoe County.

residents' photo collections. Through the engagement process, County planners clearly heard that preserving the "small-town" character of Byers was paramount, even if the community grew in the future. To define what "small-town" meant to the residents, it was decided to explore the interesting history of the community and record its legacy. The Appendix is an important component of the plan since it evolved from being the "history chapter" into a consolidated historical record that is useful for residents. The Appendix received praise from Byers' residents and the Board of County Commissioners.



Byers Depot constructed circa 1900. The Depot no longer exist at its original location.

Project Description

The Byers Subarea Plan serves as the official guiding document to direct growth, investment, improvements, and development within the unincorporated community of Byers. This plan updates the previous Byers Sub-Area Plan (adopted in 2003) and was requested by Byers' residents to revise out-of-date policies and provide an approach to consider development, infrastructure improvements, and other actions that can affect the community. The 2003 Byers Sub-Area Plan expected a surge of growth along the I-70 corridor, and at that time expected a population of 5,000 in Byers in 2020. That growth did not occur, and in the 2020 Census, the population was 1,322. Between 2000 and 2020, the population in the study area increased by seven percent, a much slower rate of growth than in the other I-70 communities of Bennett, Strasburg, and Deer Trail.

One of the goals throughout the planning process was to make this a community-driven plan. Staff asked Byers residents what elements the plan should address, and the following five themes emerged from the public engagement:

- Preserve the rural and small-town character of Byers;



The 12-square-mile Byers planning area coincides with the Byers Census Designated Place (CDP) boundaries established by the U.S. Census Bureau.

- Focus on managed and controlled growth;
- Attract small businesses and community amenities;
- Improve the appearance of the community and implement infrastructure improvements; and
- Maintain a sense of community and quality of life for families and senior residents.

These themes influenced the goals and policies in all the major topic areas in the Plan, such as land use and development, transportation, economic development, and recreation.

The Byers planning area, shown with a green boundary on the previous page, encompasses 12 square miles. The historic central area with its businesses, schools, churches, a central park, the railroad, grain elevators, and a library, is surrounded by residential neighborhoods and large parcels of agricultural land. North of I-70 is the Quint Valley Fairgrounds with a rodeo arena, event center, and ball fields.

West Bijou Creek is west of the central area of Byers and provides a valuable natural setting, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. Although the creek typically has low or intermittent flows, destructive seasonal flood events have occurred, such as in June 1965 and June 2023. The 1965 flood had a devastating long-term impact on Byers, destroying many buildings in the downtown. The 2023 flood washed out the bridge on East Colfax Avenue/ County Road 2 at the north edge of the planning area.



Quint Valley Fairgrounds.

Engagement

The foundation for the updated Byers Subarea Plan is based on input from an Advisory Committee, community surveys, and two open houses. An Advisory Committee was established with representatives from the Byers School District, Byers Water and Sanitation District, Byers Parks and Recreation District, I-70 REAP, residents and business owners, and a developer. I-70 REAP is an economic development organization focused on the eastern portion of Arapahoe County.

Public opinion was collected through two surveys as well as two community open houses that were held at the Kelver Library in Byers. For the surveys, postcards were mailed to all property owners as well as social media postings and County newsletter articles. A key partner was the I-70 REAP which provided a Byers High School intern to conduct student and Spanish-speaking residents' surveys that were added to the results of the first survey.

The first open house was held to present the results of the community survey and to gather additional comments. The second was in October 2025 when the draft Byers Subarea Plan was presented to the community for comments. Approximately 40 people attended the first open house, and 30 people attended the second. At the second open house, boards displayed the content of the draft plan, and staff was available to answer questions and explain the rationale for the goals, policies, and actions in each chapter of the plan. All surveys, open house boards, open

house summary reports, and draft plans were provided on the project website.

Comments received through the engagement process were used to create the vision statement and guiding themes and formed the basis for each chapter in the plan. The community's responses were analyzed and distilled in the "Key Takeaways and Findings" section in several chapters in the plan, which is one of the unique attributes of this plan.

Methodology and Transferability

Although following a fairly conventional planning process, there are some unique aspects to how the plan was developed. The role of the Advisory Committee was important not only to provide feedback and suggestions at key milestones in the process, but also to convey Byers' residents perceptions and insights into concerns in the community. The planning process consisted of four phases:

Phase 1 – Existing Conditions Analysis. In this kick-off phase, the Advisory Committee was convened to confirm the goals of the plan and public engagement approach. A project website was established and stakeholder interviews were held. Staff reviewed past plans and prepared potential growth scenarios and demographic information.

Phase 2 – Ideas and Options. Surveys were conducted for the residents and property owners, as well as surveys for high school students and Spanish-speaking adults. Additional public input was obtained at a well-attended open house at the Kelver Library, which included results of the survey and demographic and historical information.

Phase 3 – Draft Plan Development. Meetings were held with the Advisory Committee to distill important themes and update the Future Land Use map. The draft Plan was developed and presented to the Advisory Committee before the second open house

Phase 4 – Approval Process. Comments from the public review were incorporated into the adoption draft of the Plan, and public hearings were held at the Planning Commission and the Board of County Commissioners. The plan was strongly supported by the members of the community.



Public open house at the Kelver Library in Byers.

An overriding theme that emerged from the surveys and open house was that Byers should retain its authentic rural, small-town character. This resulted in staff focusing on the unique attributes of Byers, including its history which is detailed in Appendix A.

The Byers Subarea Plan consists of 10 chapters, and chapters four through nine are structured with goals, policies, and actions that are derived from public input, summarized as the "Key Takeaways and Findings" section in these chapters. This was intentional to link what was heard from the community to the actual goals, policies, and actions in the plan. The chapters are:

1. Introduction. This chapter explains the purpose of the Plan, identifies related plans, and explains the community engagement process.
2. Community Context. To better understand Byers' attributes, the environment, history timeline, and planning area are described. Important demographic data, primarily from the 2020 Census, compares Byers with the county as a whole. This chapter also presents three population growth scenarios.
3. Vision and Themes. The vision statement and the five guiding themes are based on community input from the public engagement process. The vision and themes form the basis for the goals, policies, and actions in the following chapters.
4. Land Use, Development, and Housing. While Byers has not recently experienced rapid population growth, there may be changes in the future. This chapter identifies physical conditions that can influence development, the land use categories and the Future Land Use Map, and goals, policies, and actions that reflect the vision and themes identified in Chapter 3.
5. Transportation and Mobility. This chapter outlines the community's vision for a safe, well-maintained, and connected transportation network. From community input, policies and actions that recommend pedestrian and bicycle connections are included.
6. Parks, Open Space, and Recreation. Enhancing the quality of life in Byers by improving its parks, trails, and open spaces, and offering more recreational opportunities are community ideas that are included in this chapter's policies and actions.
7. Community Facilities and Infrastructure. Water and sanitation infrastructure and stormwater management are addressed in this chapter.
8. Economic Development and Tourism. Based on public comments, this chapter identifies approaches for improving the business opportunities in Byers through encouraging investment and tourism.
9. Heritage and Community Identity. Recognizing that the history of Byers contributes to its uniqueness, this chapter identifies policies and actions that can increase awareness of Byers' heritage.
10. Implementation. The recommended actions in the action matrix are consolidated from the previous chapters and include capital projects, policy recommendations, and ongoing programs that implement the Plan. Comparative costs and timelines are also identified. When writing the plan, County staff wanted to ensure that the plan was practical and that actions could be achieved. The action matrix is an important feature of the plan.

Future Land Use Map

A workshop with the Advisory Committee focused on revising the Future Land Use Map and land use categories. The Future Land Use Map is a policy tool that serves as the visual framework for any desired growth and

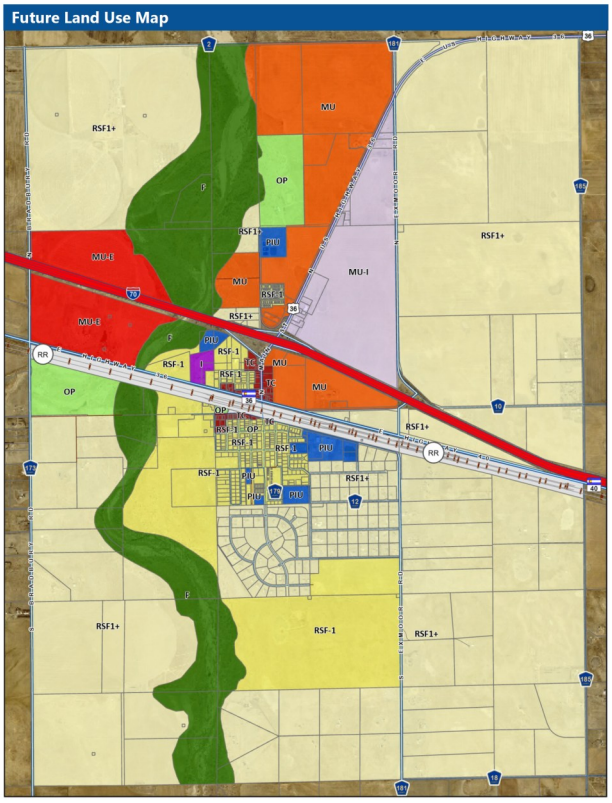
development. It is a key element of the plan since it provides the policy basis for rezoning and land use regulations and guides decisions for new infrastructure investment.

As a starting point, the 2003 Future Land Use Map was analyzed by the Advisory Committee, and discussions focused on potential and/or desirable types of development, available water (i.e., development sites in or outside of the Byers Water and Sanitation District boundaries), the ability of the Byers School District to absorb more students, challenges for infrastructure connections, and impacts on the existing community. New land use categories were developed to include anticipated or desired future land uses. The Mixed Use-Entertainment category was developed to reflect existing and potential future entertainment and hospitality venues. The Mixed Use-Industrial category was added to more narrowly define where uses such as manufacturing and warehousing could occur. The Mixed Use areas are generally located north of the established residential area of Byers to limit any negative impacts from new development on the core of the community.

Transferable Elements

A small community like Byers has unique challenges that differ from larger urban centers. Aspects from this plan that are transferable to planning in other small communities are:

- Developing growth scenarios that provide feasible population ranges. In Byers' case, the high population forecast in the original plan (5,000 in 2020) had caused ongoing concern. Providing more realistic growth scenarios helped the community visualize



Land Use Category	Intent and Uses	Density and Form
Residential Single Family, Attached and Detached (RSF-1)	Primary uses are detached and attached single-family dwellings. Examples of attached dwellings include duplex, townhome, triplex, and small-scale multiplex. Secondary uses can include places of worship, civic and cultural facilities, and child daycare centers.	Residential Uses: One dwelling unit on lots less than 1 acre Non-Residential Uses: N/A
Residential Single Family, Detached (RSF1+)	Primary use is single-family detached and attached dwellings. Secondary uses can include agricultural and ranching operations, places of worship, equestrian centers, agritainment, civic and cultural facilities, and child daycare centers.	Residential Uses: one dwelling unit on lots greater than 1 acre Non-Residential Uses: N/A
Town Center (TC)	Uses include a mix of residential, retail, office, medical, hospitality, civic, and cultural uses in a pedestrian-friendly environment with connections to the surrounding neighborhoods.	Maximum height of 35 ft.
Mixed Use (MU)	Uses include a wide range of residential and commercial uses including single-family attached and detached, restaurants, retail, office, medical, hospitality, gasoline sales, and EV charging.	Maximum height of 40 ft.
Mixed Use – Entertainment (MU-E)	Uses include a range of residential, retail, and office uses including single-family attached and detached, medical office, hospitality, and restaurant, as well as meeting halls, concert, and entertainment venues. Secondary uses can include public or private active and passive recreation facilities as specified in the Definitions section.	
Mixed Use – Industrial (MU-I)	Primary uses include retail, office, light industrial, small-scale manufacturing, indoor storage, warehousing, and distribution. Secondary uses can include restaurants and residential.	Businesses should have increased buffering and screening if adjacent to residential areas.
Industrial (I)	Uses include light manufacturing, indoor storage, retail, office, warehousing, and distribution.	
Public, Institutional, and Utility (PIU)	Uses include public, quasi-public, institutional, and utility facilities such as schools, libraries, utility substations, water and wastewater operations, and cemeteries.	
Open Space and Parks (OP)	Uses include active and passive public, quasi-public, and private parks, golf courses, country clubs, rodeo facilities, and ball fields. This use also includes trails, wildlife corridors, conservation areas, and major landscape buffers.	Maximum height of 35 ft.
Floodplain (F)	This category identifies the boundaries of the 100-year floodplain. Properties within this area are subject to compliance with Arapahoe County's Floodplain Management regulations, Chapter 4-3 of the Land Development Code.	
Railroad (RR)	Uses include railroad operations as well as commercial and industrial activities located on railroad-owned property, such as grain elevators and scales.	

Future Land Use Map and Land Use Category Table

Byers' future and temper resistance to future growth.

- Surveying high school students provided valuable insights to the planning team. In a small community like Byers with only one high school, it can be worthwhile to involve the senior students in the planning process.
- Surveying the Spanish-speaking adults also provided insights. While Byers has a small Spanish-speaking community, it was important to hear their preferences and concerns. Both this and the student survey helped frame recreation policies in the plan.
- The action matrix is often found in modern plans, but in Byers, including the action matrix provided the "map" to move forward with implementing the plan, adding opportunities for residents and property owners to advocate and volunteer to implement certain actions.
- Byers has, unfortunately, lost a number of its historic buildings to fires or floods, so the character of the original downtown was lost. An overriding theme that emerged was that Byers should retain its "rural, small-town" character. To better define this character, this resulted in staff focusing on the unique attributes of Byers, including its history, which is detailed in Appendix A and included in the Heritage chapter, and recreational opportunities along West Bijou Creek.

Originality and Innovation

In preparing this application, planning staff considered the ways that we tried to reflect in the plan the strong sense of community loyalty and desire that Byers' residents had to preserve its rural, community-focused character.

Byers is an interesting study of a community with a long history and a slow pace of growth. Staff also had to balance competing desires we heard from the community. There were residents who felt some growth was desirable, while an equal number felt strongly that Byers should remain the way it is.

There were also quantifiable limits on growth due to groundwater supply and the capacity of the school district to absorb more students.

The specific elements of the Byers Subarea Plan that are more unique for a small community plan are:

- The specific approach of surveying and listening to the community and using findings as a foundation of the plan. By using online and in-person surveys and open houses, we were able to hear from a fairly large segment of the population including high school students and the Spanish speakers.
- The "Key Takeaways and Findings" sections in several chapters in the plan link specific comments we heard to the goals, policies, and actions in that chapter.
- Defining what preserving "rural, small-town" character meant led us to research Byers' history, which in turn led to the creation of the Heritage chapter. Byers' heritage is seen as a potential foundation of economic development and tourism. This heritage can serve as a lens to evaluate future development proposals.
- The action matrix is a common feature in current planning documents, but for Byers it creates a "living document" and a roadmap for community members to volunteer for what they would like to see implemented. I-70 REAP has already committed to being the champion for implementing several economic development actions in the plan.

Modernizing the plan has improved the overall usefulness of the plan for property owners, developers, and staff to easily understand the criteria and parameters for new projects as well as County initiatives. The collaborative process between the County and Byers residents provided a forum for discussion about residents' concerns about growth, existing infrastructure conditions in the community, and the overriding desire to remain a small, people-focused community.



West Bijou Creek in the spring. This photo shows high water levels, which sometimes occur.

REAP Regional Economic Advancement Partnership

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www.i-70reap.com • admin@I-70Reap.com

Watkins

Bennett

Strasburg

Byers

Deer Trail

Aurora

Adams County

Arapahoe County

Colorado Air & Space Port

May 26, 2026

To: American Planning Association, Colorado Awards Committee

The I-70 Regional Economic Advancement Partnership (REAP) eagerly supports Arapahoe County's submission of the Byers Subarea Plan for the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association's 2026 award for Small Budget Projects.

With little budget the Public Works and Development Department carefully struck the right balance between those who want Byers to retain its small-town character and those who want managed growth. The balance appears in the vision statement, goals, and policies.

County staff listened to local stakeholders, property owners, businesses, and residents. Even Byers High School students were surveyed, a unique feature. The result is a plan that sets the wants and needs of the Byers community over the next 20 years.

What's more, this plan offers implementation strategies that an economic development organization like REAP can act on. That action is already underway.

REAP thanks Arapahoe County for its hard work and its excellent historical treatment of Byers. No question - communication, creativity, and sensitivity makes this plan a success.

Sincerely,

Louis X. "Kip" Cheroutes
Executive Director

May 27, 2026

Dear American Planning Association, Colorado Chapter Awards Committee,

I am honored to provide this letter of support recommending Gretchen Ricehill and Loretta Daniel from Arapahoe County Long Range Planning Division for recognition through the American Planning Association Colorado Chapter award program for their outstanding work on the Byers Subarea Plan.

Gretchen and Loretta demonstrated exceptional leadership, collaboration, and dedication throughout the planning process. Working closely with the Byers Park and Recreation District and numerous community stakeholders, they helped form and guide a committee focused on gathering meaningful feedback and information to shape the future vision for our community.

What makes this project especially deserving of recognition is the remarkable level of work accomplished with limited resources. Gretchen and Loretta completed extensive research, coordinated community meetings, facilitated outreach efforts, and actively engaged residents to ensure all voices within the community were represented. Their commitment to transparency and inclusion created a process that encouraged participation from diverse groups and reflected the values, needs, and goals of the entire Byers community.

The Byers Subarea Plan is a strong example of how thoughtful planning, creativity, and community collaboration can produce impactful results without the benefit of a large budget. Through persistence and genuine investment in the community, Gretchen and Loretta developed a plan that will continue to benefit Byers for years to come.

Their professionalism, organization, and ability to bring people together made this effort successful and meaningful. I strongly support their application and believe the Byers Subarea Plan exemplifies the spirit and purpose of this APA Colorado award category.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

JaLee L. Kitzman

JaLee Kitzman
Board President
Byers Park and Recreation District
jaleek@byersparkandrec.com

Sent via email to GRicehill@arapahoegov.com May 27, 2026.

May 27, 2026

Dear APA Colorado Awards Committee,

I am writing to express my support for Arapahoe County's submission of the Byers Subarea Plan for the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association's 2026 Award for Small Budget Projects.

I am the Byers Historian and President of the Byers Cemetery Association. I'm a lifelong resident of this little town in Arapahoe County.

The Byers Subarea Plan was created in-house with little to no budget. This absolutely warrants recognition as it is a well-written and beautifully designed plan that represents this community's vision for the future. It thoroughly documents our past, a rich history we were not aware of. The Subarea Plan preserves and respects our town's character while embracing growth, and this is the shining star throughout the plan.

It would be such an honor for Arapahoe County and the Byers Community to be recognized by the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association for their collaborative work on the Byers Subarea Plan.

Thank you for your consideration.

Most respectfully,

Stacie J. May
May Farms
Byers, Colorado