Land Use and Building Department
8999 Independence Way #100 • Alamosa, CO 81101
Email: landuse@alamosacounty.org • Phone: 719-589-3812

May 31, 2026

To the Awards Committee:
Please accept this submission for Imagine Alamosa County to the Comprehensive Plan award nominations.

Summary:

The Imagine Alamosa County comprehensive plan updated the existing 2008 Alamosa Master Plan to reflect changing conditions and to incorporate new statutory regulations and modern planning principles, including the best practices of the APA Sustaining Places and *The Comprehensive Plan* by Rouse and Piro as well as publications on water-based planning by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, the Babbit Center and Sonoran Institute, Western Resource Advocates, Water Now Alliance, the Urban Land Institute, and the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan supplement to the Colorado Water Plan.

Alamosa County, located in Colorado's San Luis Valley, is a rural county defined by expansive landscapes, prolific agricultural production, its role as the gateway community to Great Sand Dunes National Park, and its high-elevation arid climate. Of principle concern as we prepared in 2022 and 2023 to undertake this multi-year project was concern by the Planning Commission and County Commission about ongoing threats to the water supply in the San Luis Valley and Alamosa County. In June 2022, county staff, elected officials, and community members participated in a Growing Water Smart Workshop led by the Sonoran Institute, which explored these issues and prompted further action. County leadership understands that the continued availability and quality of water will have tremendous impact on the growth and development potential of Alamosa County in the future, and we expect our existing agricultural heritage will continue to be challenged with alternative uses for existing water resources. Additionally, we are seeing economic growth and diversification, challenges with housing, and a continued influx of new residents responding to the COVID-19 pandemic or climate change.

Starting in 2023 and concluding in July 2025, the process of rewriting our Comprehensive Plan recognized the need for a long-term vision that responds to evolving community priorities and regional challenges. A key component of this effort was the intentional development of an *enhanced* water element, supported through specific project funding, to address the unique and complex challenges of water management in a rural, valley-wide context, where resources are more difficult to manage than in communities served by centralized or municipal providers. This effort led to a forward-looking framework shaped by local values and conditions. What distinguishes this plan is its emphasis on water management as a foundational driver of land use changes, alongside agricultural preservation, utility-scale renewable energy development, diversifying economic development, and other critical issues influencing the County's future. Together, these focus areas establish a comprehensive plan that not only guides growth, stewardship, and decision-making in Alamosa County, but also serves as a model for planning around water and energy resources in neighboring counties in the San Luis Valley and in similarly situated rural communities across Colorado and the west.

Award Criteria:

Innovation & Quality

The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan demonstrates innovation by directly integrating some of the San Luis Valley's most significant growth challenges and development opportunities into the land use framework. Rather than treating land use, water resources, and large-scale utilities as separate topics, the plan intentionally connects these elements to reflect their interdependence and collective influence on the County's future. This integrated approach acknowledges water availability as a defining constraint and opportunity, ensuring that growth patterns, infrastructure investment, and resource management are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

The plan further advances quality and clarity through the use of targeted mapping and implementation tools, including a Water Availability Map and an Energy Overlay Map. These maps provide a transparent, spatial understanding of where development, conservation, and utility-scale energy projects are most appropriate, based on existing conditions and long-term capacity.

Additionally, the plan identifies Focus Areas throughout the County that illustrate a mix of land uses aligned with community goals. These Focus Areas are intentionally located where centralized and expanded utilities, such as water, sewer, and maintained road networks, can be efficiently provided, reinforcing fiscally responsible growth while protecting agricultural lands and water resources elsewhere in the County.

Engagement

The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan was developed through a thoughtfully structured, multi-phase public engagement process designed to be interactive, inclusive, and responsive to community input. Engagement occurred across three distinct phases—Setting the Foundation, Defining the Direction, and Realizing the Plan. Each phase was intentionally crafted to offer meaningful opportunities for participation while avoiding engagement fatigue. The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan prioritized inclusive engagement strategies to ensure that those voices that have been historically underrepresented in planning processes meaningfully shaped the County's future. Nearly half of Alamosa County's population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, and the planning process intentionally sought to connect with the diversity of community representation. County staff and the project team engaged residents through culturally relevant and accessible outreach, including participation in the Cinco de Mayo Celebration, intercept engagement at Tienda El Quetzal Maya Q'anjob'al, and an all-Spanish-language event at the Tierra Nueva Apartments, a USDA supported complex developed for farm workers. Spanish-language focus groups and online questionnaires were essential tools for reaching this population, and Alamosa High School students played a key role in administering surveys within Hispanic and Latino households, further strengthening trust and participation.

Equally important was the meaningful inclusion of youth voices, recognizing that those under 18 are often excluded from formal planning despite being the future residents and leaders the plan is meant to serve. A defining feature of the process was Alamosa County's partnership with Alamosa High School students, who played an active role in gathering diverse feedback and contributing ideas that directly influenced the plan's goals, strategies, and future land use framework. Their involvement exemplified a creative, collaborative approach that expanded who participates in planning and how community voices are heard.

Phase 1, Setting the Foundation, focused on meeting residents across the community through pop-up events, one-on-one interviews, and roundtable conversations to explore what community members value most about Alamosa County, the challenges they face, and opportunities for the future. During this phase, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established to help synthesize feedback into a shared vision and emerging themes. Composed of representatives from the Health Department, Chamber of Commerce, agricultural producers, food system organizations, business owners, real estate and development, and other local leaders, the CAC served as a sounding board and collaborative partner throughout the entire planning process.

Phase 2, Defining the Direction, was the most robust period of engagement and included two series of public workshops, community-led events, and online questionnaires with targeted outreach to ensure Hispanic and Latino community voices were included. A standout element of this phase was the year-long collaboration with Alamosa High School teacher Sarah Ramirez and more than 200 Alamosa High School students enrolled in government classes over three semesters. Students contributed ideas to draft goals, strategies, and the Future Land Use Plan; helped refine and administer the final public questionnaire; interviewed topic experts; and

presented their research on key issues to fellow students, community members, the Planning Commission, and the Board of County Commissioners. Their research elevated critical topics and contributed to the community discussion on homelessness, wildlife habitat preservation, sustainability, youth employment opportunities, and transportation gaps.

Phase 3, Realizing the Plan, focused on refining and validating proposed strategies through targeted outreach to those most engaged in implementation. This phase included focused conversations with community leaders in agriculture, housing, outdoor recreation, tourism, economic development, and water, building on input gathered in earlier phases. During this phase, the draft plan was released for public review in June 2025, receiving 443 views and public comments. The Planning Commission adopted the plan July 16, 2025, followed by approval by the Board of County Commissioners on July 23, 2025. Overall, this phased and collaborative engagement approach ensured that Imagine Alamosa County reflects broad community ownership, sustained participation, and a shared commitment to the County's future.

Promotion of Planning

Alamosa County staff collaborated on this project with a consultant team lead by community planners Jen Gardner, Miriam McGilvray, and Sophie Frankenburg of Logan Simpson, supported in water expertise by Bill Fronczak of LRE Water and transportation expertise by Rocio Ramirez of Felsburg Holt & Ullevig. Alamosa County is a small rural jurisdiction, and the Land Use & Building Department is a very lean operation of three individuals. Since the department director is the only practicing planner, county leadership understood that outside expertise and capacity was crucial to the success of this project. When the county solicited proposals, we stressed the need not only for a comprehensive plan document that met the requirements of funding, state statutes, and reflected best practices, but also for a project partner that could incorporate the varied expertise, perform effective engagement and incorporate community values, all through the lens of water. The process successfully met those goals and more.

During the three semesters of engagement with Alamosa High School government students, we had the opportunity to work with three different student cohorts. This meant that during each engagement phase, we started from scratch: explaining the project; educating students about the planning profession; and then connecting them to the relevant current work. Over the three semesters, students participated in over a dozen in-person events, contributing from the earliest stages of the process through classroom discussions, questionnaires, and presentations. Students facilitated the majority of responses for the first and final community questionnaires and directly influenced the Future Land Use Map with ideas such as walking and biking loops, community gathering spaces, affordable housing options, and strategies for addressing climate uncertainty and water resource preservation. Most notable was the fall 2024 semester, occurring during the definitive Phase 2, where the students worked in teams to explore a planning topic through research and then present to their peers and county leadership. Based on limited and basic instruction by county and project team staff on planning principles like engagement, equity, data collection, and perspective, these students did amazing work exploring challenges like housing, economic development, natural resource conservation, and place-based development. These efforts were on top of their regular curriculum, but teachers Sarah Ramirez and Jeremy Dorsey fully incorporated such direct engagement in actual local government activities into the purpose of civics. Alamosa High School staff used this experience in a presentation at the annual conference of the National Council for the Social Studies in Washington, DC. Selected through a peer-reviewed multi-step blind process, their presentation focused on engaging government and civics classes in local government through comprehensive planning and community engagement and was very well received.

Throughout the project, county staff and the consultant team worked with diverse community members in the Community Advisory Board, invited specific participants to open discussions, and gave multiple presentations during Planning Commission and County Commission meetings. Focused around specific aspects of the plan, these touch-points provided opportunities to promote planning in the broader community. Through guided discussions and well-facilitated events, the project team incorporated planning principles into exploratory conversations, many of which engaged folks who normally don't converse together. During the final phase, through targeted outreach around topics like housing and tourism, we were able to frame discussion around a strategic perspective that was inclusive and creative. This broadened individual perspectives to understand challenges across the community, helping to explore how a livable built environment connects to a healthy and safe community, and how harmony with natural resources and our agricultural heritage impacts the resilience of the economy. The final document was based on the four elements of Agricultural Identity, Diverse Economy, Healthy Environments, and Natural Landscapes, all of which came from the early conversations with community members, and all of which are tied together through water.

Effectiveness and Results

The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan establishes a clear and actionable implementation strategy that translates community vision into measurable outcomes. The plan provides practical guidance for crafting improved regulations for large-scale energy applications, including projects requiring 1041 permits, and it explicitly identifies lands most suitable for these uses. By clearly aligning policy direction with geographic suitability, the plan sets expectations for applicants, decision-makers, and residents, while reducing uncertainty and improving the efficiency and consistency of the development review process. The Future Land Use approach in this plan is new to Alamosa County, and it illustrates the concepts explored during the development of the plan. This helped the project team and community to visualize the potential outcome of specific goals and policies, especially as they apply to the focus areas of East Alamosa, West Hwy 160, and Mosca.

To support effective implementation, the plan relies on targeted mapping and policy tools, including a Water Availability Map and an Energy Overlay Map, which offer a transparent, data-driven framework for evaluating development, conservation, and utility-scale energy proposals. The implementation section further outlines a comprehensive suite of tools ranging from regulatory updates and partnership opportunities to new studies, programs, capital projects, and funding mechanisms. The implementation strategy provides the County with a flexible yet structured roadmap for action. Together, these strategies establish clear benchmarks for progress, guide near and long-term investments, and ensure that plan outcomes are both achievable and accountable over time.

Following the adoption of the Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan last July, Alamosa County is reviewing its Land Use & Development Code and has started amending that regulatory document to better reflect the strategic vision of the comprehensive plan. This included initial updates to subdivision regulations to incorporate the future land use categories and map and specifically to reference the Water Availability Overlay. Campground regulations were also updated to reflect water supply needs and a new Agricultural Subdivision process was created for exempt subdivisions on actively irrigated large tracts to support farmers and ranchers by more easily separating the residential portions of their land. The Energy Overlay is impacting permitting decisions for 1041 permits and conversations with potential developers of utility-scale solar projects, including a 600 MW proposal from NextEra received last August just weeks after the plan's adoption. That project falls within the preferred location on the Energy Overlay map, although it was started prior to publication of the plan. Its preferred location is now part of the 1041 permit review and therefore supports a favorable siting determination by County Staff.

Land Use and Building Department
8999 Independence Way #100 • Alamosa, CO 81101
Email: landuse@alamosacounty.org • Phone: 719-589-3812

The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan serves as a replicable model for rural communities by clearly connecting key policy elements, particularly water, energy, and infrastructure, to the Future Land Use framework. Rather than treating these topics as standalone chapters, the plan embeds them directly into land use designations, creating a transparent and defensible basis for growth decisions. This integrated structure allows other communities to adapt the approach to their own constraints and opportunities, regardless of size or capacity, while maintaining a strong link between vision, policy, and implementation.

A defining feature of the plan's transferability is its explicit treatment of water availability and quality as a primary driver of land use. In the water-limited context of the San Luis Valley, the plan demonstrates how water resources can and should shape where and how development occurs. By aligning land use designations with water capacity and long-term sustainability, Imagine Alamosa County was intentionally designed to serve as an example for other counties in the San Luis Valley seeking to manage water resources proactively and incorporate those strategies into comprehensive planning. This approach offers a practical, place-based framework that can be replicated by similarly situated communities facing resource constraints, climate uncertainty, and transitioning agricultural lands.

Conclusion

Attached to this submission are letters of support from three key individuals in this project. Sarah Ramirez was the government teacher at Alamosa High School that discovered our project during initial community outreach in March 2024, and she then pivoted her teaching plans to create an incredible opportunity for students to participate directly in local government. Pat McDermott is a 32-year employee at the SLV office of the Division of Water Resources and a member of the Alamosa County Planning Commission for the past 7 years. He was involved in the Growing Water Smart workshop in 2022 and following that discussion, he was instrumental in encouraging the Planning Commission to update our plan through the lens of water. Finally, the letter from Evanne Caviness at the Colorado Department of Agriculture reflects a current utility of our Energy Overlay. Her office funded a project lead by a team of subject matter experts, including Logan Simpson's renewable projects team, the Nature Conservancy, the Colorado Agrivoltaic Learning Center, and the COSSA Institute, to develop template code for solar and storage siting.

The Imagine Alamosa County comprehensive plan and supporting appendices can be accessed here: https://www.alamosacounty.org/181/Comprehensive-Plan-Update

Thank you very much for your consideration of our submission.
Sincerely,

Richard Hubler

Richard Hubler
Alamosa County
em: rhubler@alamosacounty.org ph:719-589-3812, ext. 1541
Land Use Administrator
Director, Land Use & Building Department
8999 Independence Way, #100
Alamosa, CO 81101

LETTER OF SUPPORT

May 27, 2028

To the Awards Committee:

I'm pleased to provide this letter of support for the *Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan* to be nominated for the COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AWARD OF THE COLORADO CHAPTER OF THE APA. As a high school teacher, most recently teaching classes in government, I'm always interested in finding ways to bring learning home and to make lessons about more than just information. I consistently work to build knowledge through personal impact. The ability to engage in creating the *Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan* exemplifies the gold standard for that aim.

I first encountered the *Imagine Alamosa County* project team during their initial kickoff week events in March 2024. Working collaboratively and thanks to their flexibility, we were able to host them during all my classes that semester to present on how land use planning impacts the community and how engagement and participation in local government processes makes democracy work. During that initial semester, all the students helped to collect survey responses from their family and neighbors on the initial community outreach. They also had an opportunity to provide direct feedback to the project team regarding their values and the vision they have for the future of the community. In the fall semester of 2024, the students undertook team research projects on specific topics that had been identified by the intervening community engagement. These semester long projects culminated in presentations to their peers and county leadership, including the County Administrator and all three County Commissioners. I firmly believe that this practical experience in civic participation enhanced the classroom learning and made them feel empowered as their voices and ideas were heard and incorporated into the final document. As the project was nearing completion in spring 2025, we again hosted the project team to review draft goals and policies and to participate in land use mapping exercises. Over all three semesters and 16 months, more than 235 students were able to engage in the planning process. Students cited this opportunity on resumes and job, scholarship, and college applications.

I greatly appreciate the chance to work with the local county government and the project team to deliver such an amazing opportunity for my students. This experience lead me and a colleague to present at the National Council for the Social Studies 105th annual conference in Washington DC on December 4, 2025. Titled "Engaging Students in Civics: Connecting Classrooms to Local Government" this session explored how by integrating local government challenges into classrooms, students can see firsthand how their voices shape policy. We discussed strategies to transform classrooms into hubs of civic action based largely on the *Imagine Alamosa County* project and teachers and civic organizations from across the county and several other nations left inspired and with concrete ways to build similar opportunities for their students.

I strongly support the *Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan* receiving recognition based on the creative and effective method of connecting youth to planning for the future of their community. This approach is absolutely a model for other communities and I hope that social studies teachers and planners across Colorado learn about our experience and take advantage of similar opportunities in their communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah E. Ramirez

Sarah Ramirez

LETTER OF SUPPORT

May 28, 2026

To the Awards Committee:

I'm pleased to provide this letter of support for the **Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan** to be nominated for the **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AWARD OF THE COLORADO CHAPTER OF THE APA**. This recent **Imagine Alamosa County** project provided a necessary update to the existing 2008 master plan, and intentionally focused on water availability as the limiting factor to development and the most important facet of strategic planning for future land uses. Since 2008, Alamosa County and the broader region, the San Luis Valley, have faced substantial changes to the legal and physical availability of water; changes which threaten our agricultural heritage, economic stability, and community values. Additionally, we have seen population growth and economic diversification, challenges with housing, and a recent influx of new residents responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to fully address the challenges and opportunities of a limited and shrinking water supply, the project team strengthened the local collaboration that began during the 2022 Growing Water Smart Workshop hosted by the Sonoran Institute. This workshop brought together county commissioners and staff, water providers, and the Colorado Division of Water Resources, representing the Office of the State Engineer. From this starting point, the **Imagine Alamosa County** project continued the focus on understanding the impact of water quantity and quality on the future of development in Alamosa County. This culminated in a Water Availability Overlay map in the final plan, and provided a basis for many of the goals and objectives throughout the plan.

As a member of the Alamosa County Planning Commission, I am pleased with the community conversations that the Imagine Alamosa County project created, and the document that resulted. Building on the importance of water with these land use planning tools will help the Commission to make better decisions about future development.

As an employee of the Division of Water Resources working in Alamosa County and the San Luis Valley over 30 years, I can state that no prior local or regional planning efforts have undertaken this task so thoroughly or connected our water supplies to land use planning so effectively.

I would be excited for the **Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan** to receive recognition for this visionary approach to addressing community needs. This innovative method of integrating water and land use planning in rural settings will be useful to other communities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. McDermott
Alamosa County Planning Commissioner
Staff Engineer- Division 3
Colorado Division of Water Resources

COLORADO
Department of Agriculture
Conservation Services Division

May 28, 2026

To the Awards Committee:

I am pleased to provide this letter of support for the **Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan** to be nominated for the **Comprehensive Plan Award Of The Colorado Chapter Of The APA**. This recent **Imagine Alamosa County** project examined community planning through the lens of water availability and how changing conditions impact both e agricultural heritage and values and potential economic development.

CDA appreciates the work Alamosa County did during the Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Planning process to integrate the water challenges that farmers and ranchers in Alamosa County face. Given the groundwater restrictions, actively farmed land will inevitably be put out of production and Alamosa County, with support from the community, Groundwater district, producers, and others, put together a realistic and hopeful vision of the future.

Given that over the last 15 years the county has seen persistent interest in renewable energy development, photovoltaic solar projects can be a viable alternative to the loss of irrigated agricultural lands. Somewhat unique to the San Luis Valley, large utility-scale solar developments are not exclusively a threat to continued agriculture, but a potential solution for property owners that will no longer have water to farm. Energy developments can be very complex, and are impacted not only by land availability, but also transmission infrastructure, natural resources, and neighbor concerns. The Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan explored these issues and included an Energy Overlay that maps areas of the county that are considered ideal for future solar farms. This innovative approach helps guide potential development and provides a framework for decision making by the County Commission.

This approach has been well received by other jurisdictions across the state and shows promise as an effective method for local communities to communicate both opportunity areas and community values to potential developers, especially those not familiar with Colorado and our agricultural production and water resources. The perspective of the Alamosa County Land Use Team significantly informed our recent efforts at CDA to develop template code and a policy guide for other counties that are interested in adopting solar siting code that balances the responsible expansion of solar in a way that aligns with local values and protects key resources.

I would be excited for the Imagine Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan **to receive recognition as this creative method of integrating water and land use planning will be useful to other rural communities. Thank you in advance for your consideration.**

Sincerely,

Evanne Caviness - CDA
Evanne Caviness

Conservation Services Division Director
Colorado Department of Agriculture

305 Interlocken Parkway Broomfield, CO 80021 P 303-869-9000 ag.colorado.gov



Public Event Community Engagement at Summerfest, held in Cole Park in Alamosa Colorado, June 2024



Community Advisory Committee members learning about watersheds during a meeting in Alamosa Colorado, October 2024



Event Flyer and social media post for Spanish language community event held at Tierra Nueva Apartments, Alamosa Colorado



Some participants at the Spanish language community outreach event, held in Alamosa Colorado, October 2024



Results of a hands-on future land uses mapping activity, provided during a community outreach event in Alamosa Colorado, October 2024



Alamosa High School students presenting their research on community character as part of the Imagine Alamosa County comprehensive plan, December 2024