



ELBERT COUNTY
We The People
Launch Edition Vol.1 No.1

Big Sky/Miller Ranch Amended Development FOR HIGH-DENSITY

This newsletter is an outreach to you by local rural residents to bring attention to Elbert County’s Master Plan for “Conservation Communities” and the proposed amendment for high-density housing by Blue Sky Ranch, formerly Miller Ranch PUD, located at County Road 154 and County Road 29, all which affect rural properties.



As this 950-acre development directly affects the homesteads of our community, our goal is to provide information as Big Sky Ranch’s application phase for the Planned Unit Development (PUD) undergoes review for rezoning and development approvals. Additionally, we point out the county’s master plan vision for creating balance between preserving the rural character of the land with development. We need to make our voices heard with the County Commissioners to ensure a balance is achieved with land developments adjacent to our properties that directly impact our quality of life.

We believe that as property owners, there are significant issues with the amendment request that substantially increases the population, and adversely affects the people living here and the current environment.

WHILE CHANGE IN THE COUNTY’S GROWTH will occur moving forward, designing balanced developments that co-exist with previous land use and properties is imperative, especially with limited natural resources such as water. Additionally, high-density developments greatly exert influence on infrastructure, utilities, services, and security.

[Blue Sky Ranch \(Miller Ranch\) Development](#)

The initial proposal to convert Miller Ranch, from a single-family cattle ranch into a residential development by Applebee Development Company was approved in February 2007 by Elbert County for 193 housing units of +/-2.5 acres lots.



Blue Sky/Miller Ranch Amended Development for High-Density - *continued*

The property, which involved three stages of development areas, was later sold in September 2024 to C and D Land Corporation, LLC, a Denver-based company.

In December 2024, the new developers held a preliminary meeting with the surrounding community at Spring Valley Golf Club to announce their request to amend the original development plan approved by the Elbert County Commissioners from 193 housing units to 1400 housing units. This represents a 625% increase.

The proposed land plats can be viewed at the Walls Planning and Design (consultant) site:

<https://www.wallsplan.com/portfolio-collections/my-portfolio/miller-ranch>

Both C and D Land Corporation and Walls Planning and Design believe the Miller Ranch development to be a thoughtfully planned residential community that will offer *affordable housing*. While the initial plat renderings were for 1600 housing units, the current plan is for 1400 units with a mix of 0.125-acre, 0.25 acre and 1-acre lots.

County Encouragement of High-Density Development to Secure Open Space

WITH THE CURRENT MASTER PLAN, Elbert County uses Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and specified design standards to encourage developers to create more open space by allowing increased density or clustering of homes in exchange for a significant amount (often 40% or more) of the land to be designated as permanent open space, referred to as “Conservation Communities.”

Developers may obtain density bonuses which provide permission to build more units than standard zoning allows through a series of incentives that offer greater benefits. Examples of the incentives are listed to the right.

Elbert County is utilizing density bonuses as a tool to achieve clustered development and preserve open space to balance rural character with development.

Central Water/Sewer. By incorporating this benefit, a bonus may be granted to increase the density (by 50%-100% more) based on providing central water/sewer to all lots.

Increased Open Space. By providing more than the minimum of open space (50%+), greater density for development may be earned.

Clustering. Design plans are encouraged to place homes closer together (clustering) to allow more land to remain as open space.

Quality Design. Design plans which include large buffers, logical open space connections, and the creation of greater community amenities earn density bonuses.



Blue Sky/Miller Ranch Amended Development for High-Density - *continued*

The goal to preserve open space is with good intention, however, the execution of such planning gives rise to multiple issues regarding density. How do you balance rural spaces with development when the design plan will take out an entire ecosystem which defines the rural area, or when the open space is designated with spaces that consist of land that a developer cannot build on vs. quality open spaces?

Where is the balance between rural and development when high-density housing is placed on the borders of adjacent landowners without inclusion of green space buffers?

At what percentage does increased density shift the culture and ecological environment?



Planning Balanced Communities

As citizens of Elbert County and the stewards of our properties, we need to make our concerns known to the Planning Commission working with the developer on the design of this community and to our Board of Commissioners, who will vote on its final approval.

From the developer perspective, high-density housing units are necessary to provide enough margin to build this housing and infrastructure and come out profitable.

To those of us living here, how do you preserve natural landscapes, a core component of the county's rural character, and a critical part of the community's identity and ecological functional if you convert the land into a high-density urban community like the Denver area...the reason we moved here to avoid?

Here are some of the concerns:

- **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION.** The northwest area of Elbert County is a High Plains /Sub-Alpine transition ecosystem zone that is arid and often draught prone. The area is covered with native prairie grasslands (rarer than the rain forest) and ponderosa pine woodlands. The



Blue Sky/Miller Ranch Amended Development for High-Density - *continued*

rural area's natural landscape will suffer habitat fragmentation, loss of woodlands and prairie grasses, and increased pollution from emissions. This sensitive land runs risk of soil erosion, loss of wildlife corridors, and wildfires.

- **WATER USAGE.** While the Blue Sky/Miller Ranch development has a Metropolitan District for Water/Sewer, this is not an area that can endure extensive water use per household and irrigation of open spaces/parks with finite water resources. The aquifers in Colorado do not have an endless supply of water. They face high withdrawals with municipal, agriculture and residential use exceeding slow replenishment. The aquifers suffer due to draught, climate changes that reduce snowmelt and surface flows, and groundwater mining. Aquifers like the Denver Basin are not easily replenished by rain, and the increased withdrawals due to growing population are using a finite, non-renewable resource according to the Colorado Division of Water Resources.
- **OVERBURDENED INFRASTRUCTURE AND HIGHER COSTS.** High-density additions in this area will amplify a lack of infrastructure, education resources, utilities, emergency services, and healthcare to meet increased population. High-density influxes will overcrowd schools and extend service response times. The expanded development could lead to a 5-25% higher cost as tax revenues from new homes will fall short of covering these increased service needs. This situation creates an increased tax burden on all residents to support these additional services as they are added which will escalate our cost of living, which we will not get a say to vote on.
- **SOCIAL AND QUALITY OF LIFE CHALLENGES.** Increased population density will alter the rural community character of this area, leading to traffic congestion, noise and light pollution, reduced green space, and potential rises in crime and social tensions.
- **COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT.** The developer's plan includes new commercial building off the entrance of County Road 154. This changes the residential zone totally and will impact traffic significantly for everyone living here.
- **OVER-POPULATION.** The estimate of Elbert County's population as of 2024 was approximately 29,400. For Blue Sky/Miller Ranch, using an average of 3 people per household with 1400 households, the population will increase by 4,200. Adding the other developments in progress from Elbert County West, Elbert County East, Spring Valley, and Cresence Colorado, the population will increase by half of the county's current population in less than a 5-10 mile radius area causing congestion and overcrowding.



Blue Sky/Miller Ranch Amended Development for High-Density - *continued*

Clear Cutting the Forest for Development

One last point, the developer will clear cut the existing ponderosa woodlands to build their proposed development, a reason for which many of us chose to live here.

The forest is an irreplaceable ecosystem which provides critical environmental services that cannot be replicated by landscaped or developed areas. This forest acts as an interconnected ecosystem supporting hundreds of plants and animal species. It also serves as crucial carbon sinks, helping mitigate changes in the climate, providing critical temperature and humidity regulation, and natural air purification and oxygen.

Tree Preservation Provision That May Affect Rezoning

On a positive note, it was brought to the attention of the Elbert County Planning Commission, an existing tree preservation zoning regulation (Amendment 5) which should be applied to the development of Blue Sky/Miller Ranch. Many of the trees in the woodlands are large ponderosas with circumferences exceeding 10 inches wide, and if taken down, the developer would be required to replace each tree with two additional trees. This would impact the high density housing plan and be costly to the developer. The Planning Commission was made aware of the regulation in their November meeting as it would affect housing in the development plats for areas 1 and 2.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR REGULAR UPDATES about the Blue Sky/Miller Ranch Development. For current information on the development and Elbert County growth initiatives. Go to:

<https://www.elbertcountywethepeople.org/contact-us/>

Add your email address and we will send you periodic email updates.

Contact the Commissioners and Make Your Voices Heard. Be Active.

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