



Town of Severance, CO

Incorporating Water Efficiency into the Comprehensive Plan

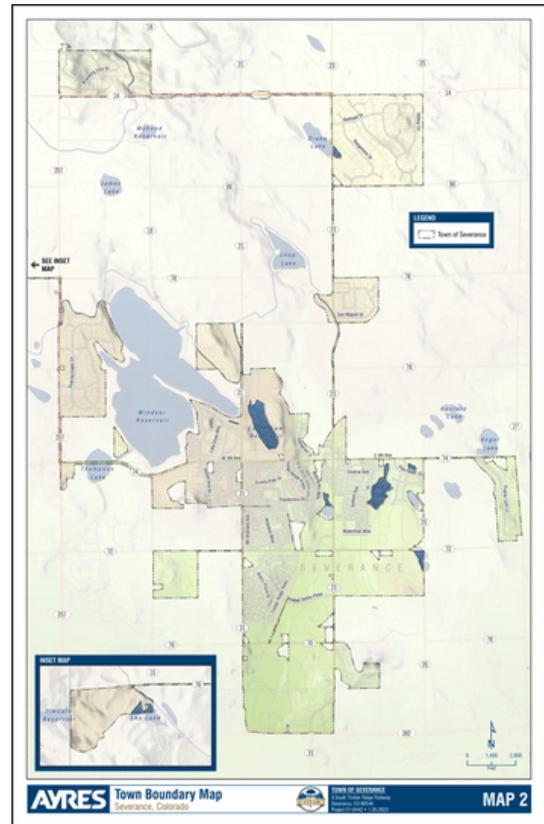


Project at-a-Glance

Community Overview

- Utility/Community: Town of Severance, CO
- Location: Severance, CO
- Population served: 10,300
- Service area: 4.7 square miles

Project Partners



Project Benefits

- Severance's Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) is a model for other small and growing communities in Colorado seeking to integrate water use and water efficiency into their own comprehensive plans.
- The Comp Plan is a critical planning component and guides all future Severance land use planning decisions and water-related policies, programs, and projects.
- The Comp Plan's enactment will result in increased resilience and water and cost-savings.

Project Challenges



Drought



Climate change



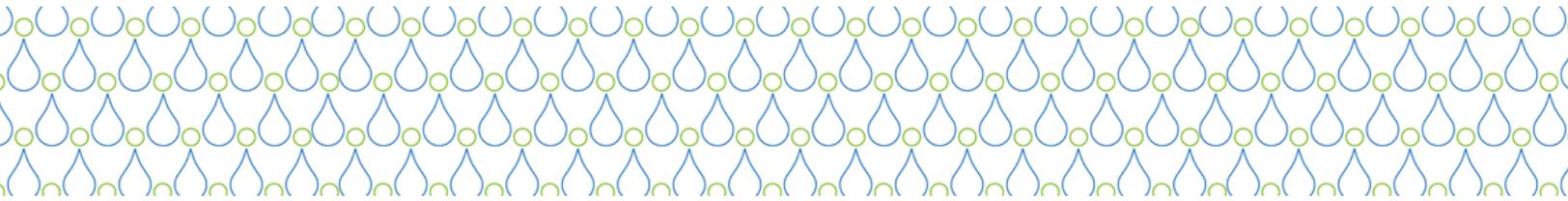
Changing Population



Lack of reliable water supply

Strategies for Success

Through Project Accelerator, WaterNow Alliance (WaterNow) and Western Resource Advocates (WRA) supported the Town of Severance (Town) in incorporating water use efficiency language into an update of the Town's [Comprehensive Plan](#), which establishes a long-term roadmap and vision for the community's future land uses and built environment. The goals of this project were to facilitate the adoption of water-wise growth principles to reduce water use in new development and to inform future water use efficiency codes, policies, and programs. The process included engaging Severance staff and officials to understand town challenges, reviewing other municipalities' comprehensive plans, drafting language that incorporated water use efficiency into the Comp Plan, and presenting the water efficiency concepts at a meeting of the Town's Planning Commission. The updated Comp Plan was officially adopted by the Town Board in January 2021.



Project Spotlight

The Town of Severance, CO, is a small community located in the Northern Front Range, approximately 50 miles north of Denver, between the major northern Colorado cities of Fort Collins, Loveland, and Greeley. Severance was established as a statutory town in 1920 and has since grown from 40 residents to an estimated population of 7,300 people in 2020. Severance has experienced a nearly 20% annual population growth rate over the past 20 years and expects similar levels of growth to continue in the next 10 to 20 years. The Town began updating its Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) at the end of 2019 to prepare for this anticipated growth and the strain it has placed on the limited water supplies available along the Front Range. To address these challenges and to meet the goals set out in the [Colorado Water Plan](#), the Town sought to incorporate water efficiency goals and priorities into their future growth and development planning by integrating water use efficiency language into their Comp Plan. This process aimed to ensure that water would be a core consideration for the Town's future growth and development decisions.

In partnership with the Town of Severance, WaterNow and Western Resources Advocates (WRA) carried out a phased approach to incorporate water efficiency language into the Town's Comp Plan.

This project involved:

- Researching and compiling existing resources on integrating water considerations into comprehensive planning;
- Identifying and conducting informational interviews with communities that have adopted exemplary comprehensive plans that include water conservation elements;
- Conducting interviews with staff and elected officials to better understand the Town's goals, values, and desired outcomes for the Comp Plan update;
- Convening stakeholder meetings to gather insights into planning goals; and,
- Drafting water efficiency recommendations to include in the Comp Plan.

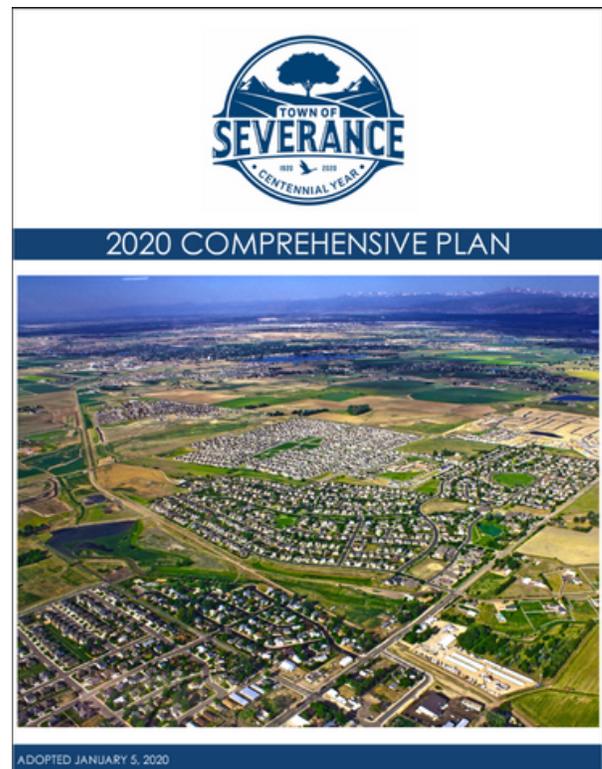
The Comp Plan will help guide the Town's growth and development and will ensure that sustainable water management is an integral part of the planning process.



Project Impacts

In a unanimous vote on Tuesday, January 5, 2021, the Severance Town Board approved the Town's updated Comprehensive Plan, taking a critical first step in integrating water conservation into their land use decision-making processes.

The final Plan incorporated water and water conservation throughout, including in the *Guiding Principles* and *Planning Influences* sections, as well as a separate *Water System Implementation* section that included specific opportunities for improving water efficiency moving forward.



Cover of Severance's Comprehensive Plan, which was drafted in 2020 and adopted in January 2021.

The next steps for the Town will be to continue to implement these goals, and to update the Comp Plan every 5-7 years. To ensure that water is not a limiting factor for the Town's anticipated population growth, the Comp Plan outlines the following strategies:

- Secure an adequate and reliable water supply for existing and future residents of the community through additional water sources, exploring requirements for non-potable water services, and reducing the amount of potable water required for new development.
- Ensure that local land use planning and water planning are in line with regional and state land use and water conservation plans and programs—including Colorado's Water Plan—by identifying strategies to meet its measurable objectives and by exploring adoption of water efficient landscape regulations.
- Ensure that local land use planning and regulation are coordinated with local water planning and regulation, by: working with [North Weld County Water District \(NWCWD\)](#), investigating how water rates and connection charges can incentive water efficiency, and considering water availability in future land use projects and development.



Article from Colorado Municipal League highlighting Severance and other Colorado communities working to integrate water and land use planning. Picture by Chaz Baculi of the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy at the March 4, 2020 Colorado Water and Land Use Planning Alliance meeting.

The Town has since focused on implementing Land Use Code updates that incorporate water conservation, based on water-related actions identified in the Comp Plan. It has implemented [multi-family standards/requirements](#) that include water conservation specifications. During 2023, the Town is planning to adopt new Non-Residential Commercial Developments Code Criteria, as well as new code language regarding Open Space Code Criteria that focuses on water conservation and requirements.

Additionally, Severance's updated Comp Plan serves as a model for other small communities. The Comp Plan was recognized in the October 2020 issue of [Colorado Municipal League's](#) magazine in the article, "Water and Land Use: Colorado Communities Working to Bring them Together," which states: "The best way to approach water conservation at the community scale is in the planning stage."

Severance's updated Comp Plan does just that, prioritizing water and water efficiency in land use planning processes throughout the town and contributing to the 2015 [Colorado Water Plan](#) objective to have 75% of Coloradoans living in communities that have incorporated water-saving actions into land-use planning by 2025. Mitch Nelson, Severance's Land Use Planner, was invited to share findings from the project alongside WaterNow, WRA, and others in a webinar hosted by the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) on Water & Land Use Planning, as part of their annual Small Communities Workshop.



Lessons Learned

The project team identified several key findings about the comprehensive plan development process:

- It is important to **identify and solicit clear goals and objectives as they relate to water**, both from residents and elected officials. Different stakeholders have different motivations for supporting water conservation. For example, identifying why water conservation is important—because the community wants growth to continue despite limited supplies, because the community wants to keep water rates affordable, or because the community wants to reduce the need for ag-to-urban transfers—will be important for translating high-level goals into actionable policy items in a Comp Plan. Similarly, it is important for communities to determine if they want water supplies to be a limiting factor for growth and development. If not, then the community can identify water efficient land use planning policies that enable growth without the need for additional water supplies.
- Key decisions about incorporating water efficiency into a Comp Plan include:
 - In which plan section(s) should water efficiency be best incorporated into a Comp Plan? Should water efficiency be incorporated throughout the entire Comp Plan or should it have its own stand-alone section?
 - How should the Comp Plan support and integrate with other Town planning efforts?
 - What level of detail should be included in the Comp Plan? Should the Comp Plan only include high-level goals or objectives around water efficiency? Or should the Comp Plan go into great detail about specific water efficiency programs and policies that should be implemented?

There may be discussion regarding which **goals and actions are most appropriate to include in the Comp Plan**, versus which belong in subsequent code amendments, ordinances, and efficiency incentive programs.

- It is essential to **articulate a suite of goals, priorities, and action items as they relate to water efficiency**. The more options a community can include in their Comp Plan, the more flexibility they will have in implementing new codes, regulations, and policies that advance water efficiency.

For example, the [Woodland Park, CO Comprehensive Plan](#) includes water as a stand-alone element and includes water-related goals and action items in a variety of sections (including wastewater and transportation). Across all of these sections are a variety of topics, including equitable tap fees, identification of housing capacity limits, pursuing increased density, and encouraging native and xeriscape design features, Low Impact Development features, and efficient plumbing fixtures. Woodland Park also includes water conservation and reuse in their Sustainable City goals and action items, providing another opportunity for furthering water efficiency.

Both the updated Comp Plan and Severance's process of integrating water into this foundational document provide a resource and model for other communities seeking to actively consider the pivotal role of water in planning and land management discussions.