

TOWN OF BLUFF GENERAL PLAN

Pursuant to Title 10, Chapter 9a, Section 401 of the Utah State Code (accessible online at <https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title10/Chapter9A/10-9a-S401.html>)

2025 Draft Amendments

THIS GENERAL PLAN was approved by the affirmative vote of a majority of the Town Council of the Town of Bluff this ____ day of _____, 2025. This ordinance shall take effect immediately upon passage.

By: _____

Mayor Ann Leppanen

Date

Attest:

By: _____

Recorder

Date

Acknowledgements

Indigenous Lands Acknowledgement

The Town of Bluff acknowledges that it is located on the traditional, ancestral, and current lands of the Hopi, Diné, Ute Mountain Ute, Ute, Rio Grande Puebloan¹ People, and other traditional Indigenous inhabitants of that land. The Town acknowledges the Ancestral Pueblos, Hopi, Diné, Ute Mountain Ute, Ute People and Rio Grande Pueblo People who steward the Bluff landscape and the greater Four Corners Region now and since time immemorial.

¹ Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zia and Zuni Pueblos.

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Vision Statement

Bluff envisions a community which manages growth to protect and enhance Bluff's unique character, community, and livability. Active management and protection guide orderly, reasonable, and mindful growth and development. Bluff seeks to enhance and protect certain elements of the community, known as "Highly Valued Elements". These include:

1. The Landscape: Cliffs, bluffs, canyons, San Juan River corridor, cottonwood trees, farmland, flora and fauna wildlife, noise levels, and the night sky;
2. History: Pioneer, Native American, and other historical buildings/sites as well as written and oral stories and accounts;
3. Prehistory: All ancient Native American sites/areas;
4. Cultural Diversity: Peoples in this region represent a mix of cultures, individuals, age groups, incomes, and beliefs;
5. Rural/Residential Lifestyle: Low residential density and rural character of the developed community;
6. Sustainable, Small-Town Economy: Enhance livelihoods, provide access to goods and services, and ensure equitable access to resources.

In balancing these values in our future, Bluff must above all protect its water and aquifer resources with diligence. Bluff's future development may be restricted by the availability of water.

Introduction

What is a General Plan

Title 10, Chapter 9a, Section 401 of the Utah State Code requires each municipality prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-range General Plan for present and future needs of the municipality and identify growth and development of all or any part of the land within the municipality. The code specifies the topics that must be addressed in the Plan based on the municipality class. Utah Code Section 10-9a-403 (3) specifically empowers municipalities to include additional plan elements beyond those mandated by state statute. Communities are encouraged to include sections on issues deemed necessary to address local conditions and community priorities such as historic preservation, environmental protection, parks and recreation and more.

The General Plan is the foundation for local ordinance creation and enforcement, designed to support public services and ensure Bluff's *Highly Valued Elements* are preserved and protected. General Plans are also intended to guide sustainable economic activities and orderly growth while simultaneously strengthening transparent, inclusive, and fair processes for residents in decisions in the best interest of the "common good."

Community Profile Information

Bluff is a small community, population 240 (according to 2020 U.S. Census) immediately north of the San Juan River. Bluff is geographically located centrally to communities along the San Juan River in Utah and is the crossroads of north-south US 191 and east-west State Roads (SR) 162 and 163 that efficiently connect much of southern San Juan County to communities to the north. Just to the west of town lies the Bears Ears National Monument, increasingly recognized internationally for both spectacular recreation and rich cultural and historical values. To the south is the northern part of the Navajo Nation that includes Monument Valley. Bluff, an isolated outpost through the end of the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, finds its location, history, and proximity to archaeological treasures attracting increased global tourism. Residents recognize that these connections bring significant opportunities for cultural exchange and economic development, while also presenting challenges related to preservation, infrastructure, and community character.

Also adding to Bluff's character is the nearby Bureau of Land Management put-in for all private and commercial recreational boating down the San Juan River, ending near Lake Powell. The San Juan is a major tributary of the Colorado; boaters begin their trips in Bluff and, through vehicle shuttles, frequently end trips in Bluff as well.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Based on 2020 Census data*

Population	240
Median Income	\$53,973
Employment Rate	22.9%
Housing Units	102
Total Households	71
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	67.8%

*Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, data from the 2020 census may have inaccuracies.

Plan Development

The first General Plan was drafted in 2018 and 2019 to not only meet the requirements of Utah State Code, but to highlight the values and ideals of the greater community during the incorporation process. Over two dozen people worked together to compile the necessary documentation and direction of the General Plan. We are grateful for the volunteer work of the Town Council, the Planning & Zoning Commission, Planning & Zoning Advisors, Southeastern Utah Association of Local Governments, Mary Gillam, and many members of the public. The original plan development included public meetings, Planning & Zoning work sessions, public hearings, and public mapping sessions over a one-year period.

Bluff acknowledges that while a General Plan is required to obtain and maintain municipal status, certain aspects of town governance and community well-being are too detailed to be fully addressed within that framework. To complement the General Plan, the Town of Bluff undertook an eight-month strategic planning process in 2023 to develop a Long-Term Strategic Plan covering a five- to seven-year horizon. To ensure broad and balanced participation, Bluff Town Council engaged a third-party facilitator, creating space for diverse perspectives and minimizing barriers for community members who might not align with current municipal leadership.

The facilitation team collected extensive community input through individual interviews, group listening sessions, multi-day workshops, and several rounds of draft reviews. In addition, they drew upon existing resources, including the General Plan, to ensure alignment and continuity. This interconnected planning approach is reflected in the 2025 General Plan updates and enhances the strength, credibility, and practical value of both the Strategic Plan and General Plan documents.

Council Direction & Implementation

Bluff Town Council supports sensible, inclusive government decision-making, careful and conservative planning, and preservation of Bluff's natural and cultural values. The council also believes that Bluff's unique strengths will support meaningful and sustainable economic growth in the years ahead. Each of these aspects will contribute to long-term revenue security.

The Planning & Zoning Commission is an appointed body responsible for development, reviewing, and recommending land use regulations, plans, and ordinances compatible with the General Plan. Zoning and ordinance decisions must be consistent with the goal of preserving and maintaining the healthy, peaceful, quiet, and scenic environment widely valued by residents and visitors. Long-term sustainability requires plans that protect current and future inhabitants' access to safe, clean water. For these reasons, extractive industries such as oil and gas development do not fit within the town's development goals. Zoning and ordinance decisions will guide economic development compatible with these values and goals.

In 2019, the Town of Bluff developed a zoning code to guide development compatible with Bluff's town goals and has passed additional ordinances since that time. In 2025, the Town of Bluff became recognized as an International Dark Sky Community. The development of land use ordinances is ongoing and subject to continuous review and public input.

This plan will serve as a guide to future growth and development, so that the basic values and traditions of the community may be passed on for future generations to enjoy.

How the Plan is Organized

Following the Vision Statement, Introduction, and Community Goals Statement, the General Plan is organized into Land Use, Transportation, Economic Development, Heritage and Historic

Preservation, Health, Safety and Infrastructure, Development Constraints, Enforcement, and Plan Implementation. Within each of these main sections there may be additional subsections. Each subsection will have information on Current Conditions, Planning Assumptions, and Resulting Policies.

The sequence of sections is arbitrary and does not signal any prioritization. Though sections are stated separately for clarity and convenience, collectively they are the mosaic of Bluff's Vision. This plan outlines how and where development should occur and establishes policies designed to fulfill and support the community vision.

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Community Goals

The Town of Bluff is a gateway community, far from metropolitan areas. It is surrounded by not only a beautiful landscape but also a rich diversity of history and culture. The warm, welcoming character of its residents along with these cultural and outdoor experiences, draw people to visit and live in Bluff. To preserve its distinctive quality of life, all ordinances will be carefully drafted and enforced with ten goals in mind. (The goals are numbered for reference; numbers do not designate importance or priority):

1. Preserve and enhance Bluff as a scenic, rural community that appreciates, utilizes, enjoys, and protects its distinctive environment.
2. Protect the unique character, eclectic architecture, and scale of the town.
3. Protect the clean water and air; preserve the natural environment and natural resources of the community for future generations; protect animal welfare.
4. Protect the quality of life, privacy, safety, and security of the community.
5. Protect viewscales, a sense of open space, quiet atmosphere, and dark skies.
6. Preserve the strong sense of community and diversity of people.
7. Encourage thoughtful development that enhances and supports sustainable community development, stable local employment, locally owned businesses, and tourism.
8. Encourage affordable housing opportunities to allow a broader audience into the community, including long term rentals and home ownership.
9. Protect designated recreational and open space areas from future development.
10. Preserve the character of the historical and prehistoric elements and historically classified structures.

Section 1: Land Use

General Goal

Land Use Section 1 has six subsections: Private Land, Public Land, Zoning, Preservation of the Aesthetic Values, Sustainable Development, and Conservation. All ten Community Goals are addressed in Land use.

Private Land

Current Conditions

16.67 percent of land in Bluff is privately owned. Ownership of private land parcels is recorded at the San Juan County Courthouse in Monticello, Utah. Private land is used for residences (year-round and second homes), businesses, agriculture, and undeveloped property.

A subdivision ordinance was written and updated in 2024.

Planning Assumptions

1. Land use policies and ordinances have been established and will be periodically reviewed, amended, or supplemented with new ordinances for all areas within the town of Bluff.

Resulting Policies

1. Review existing and adopt new ordinances and land use policies.
2. Identify, review, and address issues concerning private land with the potential for commercial use.

Public Land

Current Conditions

A significant portion, almost 84%, of incorporated Bluff is considered public land. The table below shows the breakdown of landownership.

	Acreage	Square Miles	Percentage of Surveyor Total	Percentage of Calculated Total
Federal Land/Bureau of Land Management ¹	10,692.10	16.71	45.12%	45.24%
Utah Trust Lands Administration (TLA or "SITLA") ²	8,756.51	13.68	36.95%	37.05%
Private Ownership	3,950.20	6.17	16.67%	16.72%
San Juan County/ San Juan School District ³	69.94	0.11	0.30%	0.30%
Tribal ⁴	58.60	0.09	0.25%	0.25%
Town of Bluff Government ⁵	53.24	0.08	0.22%	0.23%
State of Utah (UDOT)	51.51	0.08	0.22%	0.22%
Calculated Total based on Known Ownership	23,632.10	36.93		100%
County Surveyor totals	23,696.76	37.03	99.73%	
Unknown Ownership	64.66	.10	.27%	

¹ BLM ownership acres – Confirmed by BLM GIS Specialist, Elizabeth Lament, on November 21, 2022

² SITLA ownership acres – Confirmed by SITLA Deputy Assistant Director of the Southeast Area, Bryan Torgerson, on November 21, 2022.

³ San Juan School District Ownership – confirmed by San Juan School District Business Administrator, Tyrel Pemberton, on November 21, 2022.

⁴ Tribal land calculation through GIS data provided by Bryan Torgerson - based on shifts in the San Juan River on the southern border of town.

⁵ Includes Roads and property. Road information calculated by Michael Haviken on November 15, 2022. Previous private land ownership data obtained from Mary Gillam.

Activities on public lands within and nearby Bluff could impact the community, environment, public safety, economy, and water.

Planning Assumptions

1. With the exception of Town-owned properties and roads, Town of Bluff Planning and Zoning has no jurisdiction over Public Lands within Town boundaries.
2. Town of Bluff Planning and Zoning has overlaid zones over Public Lands within Town boundaries to which the land will revert in the event it is sold or transferred to private ownership.
3. Town of Bluff government may exercise influence over how Public Lands are used.

Resulting Policies

1. Collaborate with federal, state, and regional land management agencies to identify and solve potential problems that may arise on public lands within and near Bluff town boundary.
2. Negotiate conservation easements and leases to conserve land for its natural, recreational, scenic, and historical value.
3. Identify and understand activities that may occur on public lands in and near town boundary that could potentially impact the community and environment and seek to address any issues that may arise.
4. Research, write, and adopt guidelines for public land transfers within Bluff town limits. Develop guidelines for public to private land transfers within Bluff town boundary.

Zoning

Current Conditions

The Town of Bluff approved a Zoning Code in 2019 that established the following zones: Agricultural A-1 District, Agricultural A-2 District, Agricultural A-3 District, Commercial C-1 District, Commercial C-2 District, Commercial C-3 District, Factory-Industrial, and Residential. As of 2025, there are not currently any parcels zoned as Factory-Industrial. The majority of commercially-zoned properties are located along or within a few blocks of Highway 191 to concentrate commercial activity along the highway and to encourage residential development away from the main thoroughfare.

In 2025, Town Council established the Bluff Building Department, transferring regulation and oversight of building permits and related matters from San Juan County to the Town of Bluff. This process necessitated evaluation of many of the land use ordinances to ensure jurisdiction references changed from San Juan County to the Bluff Building Department. The addition of the department also required evaluation of administrative capacity vs board-led decisions on matters related to land use.

A number of land use regulations and requirements are passed down through state-directed legislation. Included in these regulations have been airport overlay zoning, moderate income housing, public transit requirements, and more. Often, state-directed legislation has different requirements based on the municipality class and size. As a Town with fewer than 300 people, Bluff is often exempt from some or all requirements.

Planning Assumptions

1. Land within the incorporated boundaries was zoned according to the vision of the General Plan and thoughts for future growth and sustainable development. Properties can be re-zoned but in general, current zoning meets the vision of the General Plan and Strategic Plan.
2. While current zoning regulations align with the community's existing vision and values, Bluff recognizes that evolving needs and opportunities may arise over time.
3. We create and store detailed maps and records of property and covenants within Bluff town boundary.
4. New structures erected in Bluff town boundary meet all state building codes and Bluff building ordinances.
5. All property owners will be required to obtain all applicable permits prior to construction or installation of any structure.
6. State code requirements change frequently, and Bluff must act with efficiency to draft, approve, and enact land use ordinances.
7. Bluff is required to adhere to state-directed land use regulations, and may choose to follow the guidance of state-directed land use regulations, even if the legislation is only required for larger class cities.

Resulting Policies

1. Actively solicit input and participation in land-use planning and decision-making processes.
2. Continue to promote affordable housing, including tiny homes, employee housing, and long-term rentals (more than 30 days).
3. Allow and encourage alternative building methods, using alternative materials, while holding to state and local building codes.
4. The Planning and Zoning commission will continue to evaluate state code requirements and best practices to encourage thoughtful land use regulations that support the general plan.
5. Develop additional enforcement mechanisms to ensure landowner compliance throughout the planning, development, and post-development phases of new construction.
6. Develop and adopt a Conditional Use Permit Policy.
7. The Future Land Use Map, attached in Appendix _____, should serve as a guide for future zoning amendments and development decisions.

Preservation of Aesthetic Values

Current Conditions

Businesses and homes, along with recreational, historic and agricultural areas, are intermixed throughout Bluff with varying aesthetic qualities and architectural styles. Commercial development is largely along Highway 191. With few exceptions, buildings are two-stories or less.

Substantial setbacks within lot margins along roads are common and lend the town a spacious and semi-rural feel. Lot sizes are generally substantial due to pioneer tradition as well as the requirements of septic leach fields. For example, single dwellings in the Cottonwood Addition (subdivided in the 1950s) commonly occupy three or more of the originally-subdivided lots.

Bluff's septic systems have further shaped the town in providing ambient soil moisture for tree growth. Old-growth cottonwoods and deep shade throughout the town provide Bluff with its oasis-like character. The openness and low height of buildings allow for broad, scenic views of cliffs to the north and south as well as more distant vistas from most locations in Town. Neighborhoods are clustered in

response to geology, drainages, and transportation corridors which in many cases provide unplanned but valuable open space corridors.

The small-town charm of Bluff is further enhanced by low noise levels, dark skies, cleanliness, and a sense of homes being secluded by greenery. These values are important to residents of Bluff.

Planning Assumptions

1. Building is aligned with current patterns described above will preserve Bluff's unique character.
2. The rustic and natural characteristics and limited exterior lighting should be preserved.
3. Ordinances have been developed to ensure aesthetic and quality of life values.
4. Highway and other noise should be kept to a minimum via ordinance.
5. Dark night sky is an important aesthetic value protected both in an ordinance and in our Dark Sky designation.
6. Future septic disposal decisions will consider the impact on tree growth.
7. Compliance Officer position is needed.
8. Land use ordinances address non-compliant/non-conforming structures.
9. Setbacks have been established for all zones.

Resulting Policies

1. Ordinances will continue to be developed consistent with stated aesthetic, noise, light, and other related values.
2. Encourage development of funding sources to assist community members with compliance with new or updated ordinances.
3. Encourage the rehabilitation or redevelopment of substandard buildings and structures.
4. Create No Engine Braking throughout town.
5. Create ordinances which address the allowable noise level(s) at different times of day for different zoned areas.
6. Create an ordinance to manage the proliferation of RVs in town balances affordable housing with aesthetic and septic concerns. Encourage the placement of all utilities underground.
7. Encourage planting of trees and plants compatible with services and suitable to soil and climate conditions.

Sustainable Development

Current Conditions

While Utah has one of the highest growth rates in the country, population growth in San Juan County is low. Between 2020 and 2024, the town averaged six Land Use Clearances for building a year – though if Sam had applied for them, it would have likely been higher. Because Bluff has a limited supply of private land, this means growth is restricted, and it also compels the Town and residents to carefully consider what type of sustainable development to promote. Throughout the 2016 'Listening to Bluff' process, numerous residents expressed the desire to avoid the unwanted socially unsustainable tourism development that is occurring in other areas. Community members expressed their desire to retain the current solitary identity of Bluff, while still embracing sustainable tourism development. (Listening to Bluff, Pg. 43)

Planning Assumptions

1. Population and tourism will result in increased pressure on residential and commercial properties and public services. Bluff's tourism economy may lead to a disproportionate demand for properties, which are seen in similar areas to diminish the residential housing and

land inventory. Second home and vacation rentals often substantially impact long-term rental and residential housing inventory. A proper balance of residential and commercial properties must be maintained.

2. Sustainable quality development balances economic development with human needs and natural resource limitations.
3. In 2021, the town enacted Commercial Short-Term Rental Ordinance 2021-20a-7 to limit the number of short-term rentals in residential zones so as to protect housing inventory. There are no plans to change this.
4. Mixed uses are allowed in Commercial Zones, including residences, which supports the housing inventory.

Resulting Policies

1. Ordinances will address sustainable development with input from the community.
2. Research density models and adopt policy encouraging and protecting full-time residences.
3. Consider employee housing requirements for large commercial developments as well as ways to preserve low-density feel and open scenery.
4. Consider ordinances related to the number of new water taps permitted each year.
5. Encourage affordable housing. (Bluff is exempt from Utah Code affordable housing requirement)

Conservation

Current Conditions

Conservation is a core community value and a key aspect of Bluff's long-term success. People are drawn to Bluff for its surrounding public lands, pristine dark night skies, expansive viewsheds, and the San Juan River. The town is surrounded by culturally and ecologically significant landscapes, including Bears Ears National Monument, Comb Ridge, and numerous archeological sites. These areas are not only visually striking but also sensitive to overuse and development.

Bluff faces challenges common to desert communities, including limited and unpredictable water supply, extreme weather events, and pressures from increasing visitation. Tourism brings economic benefits but also creates demands on natural resources, infrastructure, and the community's ability to preserve quiet, clean, and healthy surroundings.

The Town of Bluff earned the Dark Sky Community Designation from DarkSky International in June 2025, demonstrating the community's commitment to protecting the night skies from light pollution. Local efforts, including conservation easements, water conservation initiatives, and responsible land management practices, continue to be priorities.

Planning Assumptions

1. Tourism will remain a cornerstone of Bluff's economy, and conservation of natural and cultural resources is essential to maintaining Bluff's appeal to visitors.
2. Growth pressures, both residential and commercial, will continue to increase demand for limited water resources.
3. The community will face growing climate-related challenges, including higher temperatures, prolonged droughts, and more intense storm events.
4. Dark sky protections, scenic views, and the San Juan River corridor are among Bluff's most valued assets and require intentional preservation.
5. Conservation and sustainable development practices will strengthen Bluff's resilience and help balance community growth with environmental stewardship.

6. Regional collaboration with state agencies, neighboring communities, and tribal nations will be essential to effective conservation and land-use planning.

Resulting Policies

1. As new residential and commercial structures are built, conservation should be encouraged through education, incentives, and land-use ordinances.
2. Emphasize water conservation by requiring low-flow fixtures in new commercial buildings and encouraging them in residential construction.
3. Minimize the use of herbicides, insecticides, and similar materials, and encourage the research into alternative methods such as integrated pest management.
4. Develop policies that require new commercial construction to install low-flow water fixtures. Encourage low-flow fixtures in new residential construction.
5. Protect environmentally sensitive areas, riparian zones, and wildlife corridors through planning and zoning tools.
6. Research funding sources for educational programs and workshops on rainwater harvesting systems, xeriscaping, permaculture, and water conservation strategies.
7. Encourage renewable energy adoption, particularly solar and wind, while ensuring compatibility with dark sky values and viewsheds.
8. Allow and encourage urban agriculture, as water resources permit, including home gardens, community gardens, composting, low impact livestock (e.g. chickens), sales of produce, and community-driven farmer's markets.
9. Consider landscaping and green space ordinances that promote low-to-no water usage (i.e. xeriscaping) on commercial properties.
10. Pursue partnerships and funding for conservation education, infrastructure improvements, and habitat protection.
11. Encourage placement of Bluff residents on regional and state decision making initiatives.

Section 2: Transportation

General Goals

Bluff seeks to ensure traffic is kept safe, quiet, and flowing. Bluff intends to provide adequate and diverse pedestrian, non-motorized, and motorized circulation opportunities.

The Town of Bluff intends to ensure continued public access to public lands such as the rivers and canyons.

Future transportation policy will protect and encourage access options to neighboring communities to encourage both physical and communication connections.

The Town of Bluff will continue to maintain and improve current town transportation infrastructure including Class C town Roads the Bluff Airport, while supporting additional opportunities for non-motorized trails and paths.

Motorized Transportation

Current Conditions

Bluff is situated on US 191, a well-traveled tourist and commercial route. Just east of the historic residential area, US Highway 191 emerges from Cow Canyon, circumvents south of Bluff Historical district, and runs west bridging over Cottonwood Wash. Thus, Bluff is divided north and south by the Highway, and east and west by Cottonwood Wash, a significant drainage tributary to the San Juan River. This intersection also serves as the “zero-zero” (0,0) marker for addressing. US HWY 191 is known as “Main Street”. Residential, commercial, historic, school, and public properties front the highway. US 191 is the only vehicular access across Cottonwood Wash.

Concerns have been raised regarding the entrance to the new elementary school being closer to the highway and closer to higher speed limits on the highway. Concerns are noted as well to the growth of businesses at both ends of “town” and amount of traffic.

Bluff Elementary School moved from East Bluff to west of Cottonwood wash in 2020. The primary parking lot for the school is located directly on Main Street and despite continued conversations with UDOT about the concerns of having a school on a state highway, the speed limit through town-proper remain 40 miles per hour on highway 191. Multiple businesses, including larger developments on both ends of the commercial district also have a 40 mile per hour speed limit in front of them. Turn lanes have been added, however, additional traffic slowing measures have been requested and suggested to UDOT.

The majority of the streets within the Town of Bluff are on a grid pattern, running in the cardinal directions within town-proper. Homes and businesses are accessible by streets running parallel and perpendicular to US 191. US 191 is part of a popular tourist “loop” connecting Las Vegas with many of southern Utah’s most popular National Parks and Monuments.

Current Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) road classifications include Class A, B, C, and D roads. Class C Roads within the Town are roads the town has jurisdiction over and are classified as paved, gravel, or dirt. Class C Roads must be easily drivable with a two-wheel drive vehicle. Bluff Town is responsible for maintenance and repair of its Class C roads.

As of January 21, 2025, the following Class C Road measurements are on file with UDOT:

Paved = 7.89 miles

Gravel = 4.94 miles

Dirt = 4.95 miles

Total Class C Roads = 17.78 miles

Class D roads are considered “back roads” and non-maintained dirt roads. The total length of Class D roads within the Town’s boundary as of June 7, 2018 is 68.3 miles. High clearance four-wheel drive is recommended on these roads.

UDOT currently provides maintenance funds for Class C designated roads, which is calculated based on the total number of miles of each type of road. Decades of neglect to the Town’s roads have resulted in a backlog of necessary maintenance. The Order of Magnitude estimate to bring the Bluff C roads up to a maintainable level is estimated between \$1,500,000 to \$2,000,000.

The operation of off-road vehicles (OHVs) is common within the town boundary. On public lands, OHVs are allowed only on designated roads and routes.

Planning Assumptions

1. Prioritization of road repairs and ongoing maintenance will depend on current conditions and funding.
2. Due to the bisection of town by a major drainage coupled with the location of Bluff Elementary School, existing and future necessary emergency / contingency routes should be identified and addressed.
3. Motorized traffic in residential areas, particularly in the historic district, should be minimized.

Resulting Policies

4. Continue relationship with San Juan County Transportation Board and apply annually for matching roads funds for ongoing projects on Class C Roads"
5. Research and pursue alternative pedestrian routes to two US 191 bridges: across Cottonwood Wash and across the San Juan River.
6. Create a policy to regulate OHV use and decibel levels on residential roads.
7. Consider public parking zones and street parking.
8. Ensure emergency access is available on private roads and access easements.
9. Continue partnerships with state agencies for current and future maintenance and Development.
10. Create a parking ordinance that includes parking in the right-of-way and ADA requirements and consider effective enforcement options.
11. Support public transportation programs between communities.

Non-Motorized, Pedestrian, and Active Transportation

Current Conditions

As of 2025, special interest groups have worked to develop plans for increasing transportation opportunities for pedestrians, cyclists, and other forms of non-motorized transportation. The Town of Bluff formed the Active Transportation Advisory (ATA) Committee in August 2022 to serve as a recommending body to explore non-motorized transportation opportunities within the community. With council approval, the ATA Committee worked with Bike Utah to develop an Active Transportation Plan in 2023 to serve as the strategic direction to better non-motorized travel throughout Bluff. The plan

provides high-level recommendations that allow for a safe and comfortable local network of walking and biking facilities. Specifically, it includes support and direction for the Town of Bluff to add new facilities for people walking, biking, etc. Additionally, policy and programmatic recommendations are provided that can steer land-use and other aspects of (re)development related to active transportation to meet the town's priorities associated with reducing motorized traffic in residential neighborhoods.

The ATA plan incorporated various stakeholder feedback, including community workshops. The resulting plan includes future-state Neighborhood Byway maps, as well as potential connections to region-wide trail networks. These maps can be found in Appendix J.

In addition to the creation and adoption of the Active Transportation Plan, the Bluff Town Council also approved a long-term strategic plan. This planning document reiterates Bluff's commitment to safe, equitable, environment-friendly transportation routes and includes a specific objective to implement the aforementioned ATA plan and establish walking paths through the historic district.

Special interest groups have worked to develop other trail systems within the incorporated town limits. The Bluff City Historical Preservation Association worked with the Bureau of Land Management to develop a one-mile ADA accessible trail at Sand Island Recreation Area. The entire Bluff River Trail system totals over eight and a half miles.

Several access points have been developed to access the San Juan River trail throughout town, however parking and trailhead access remain a challenge within town-proper.

Pedestrians commonly walk or bicycle in the substantial, informal residence and business setbacks in Bluff as well as numerous trails in and near the town. Interest has been expressed in creating a bike path through town and formalizing, through mapping, town trails that would access the San Juan River Trail and surrounding natural attractions.

There are currently no formal pedestrian or non-motorized crossing places bridging the San Juan River. US 191 and the streets of Bluff are popular routes for running, walking, and biking recreation. Highway 191, as well as Highway 162 and Highway 163 all lack bike lanes and most stretches lack adequate shoulders for safety. Several annual bike races and runs come through town.

Planning Assumptions

1. Bluff seeks to better its infrastructure and accommodations to encourage non-motorized travel such as cycling and walking.
2. Walkways, trails, bike lanes, and informational and safety signage will help promote pedestrian traffic along with human health and wellness.
3. Bluff is a mix of residential, commercial, historic, and public properties with no centralized downtown area to focus pedestrian traffic. The pedestrian routes in Bluff will, by necessity, travel through all of these districts.

Resulting Policies

1. Identify and pursue funding sources for constructing pedestrian and non-motorized infrastructure and accommodations consistent with the approved Active Transportation Plan.
2. Consider access to safe crossings.
3. Construct a safe path system for non-motorized transportation traffic based on the approved Active Transportation Plan throughout town in the residential areas and adjacent to the highway.
4. Support the San Juan River Trail and related trail systems.
5. Encourage and provide bike racks at town-owned facilities

6. Plan for pathways to the river and canyons.
7. Continue to explore creative ways to reestablish the former footbridge over the San Juan River to reconnect to neighbors. Research possible rebuilding options as a historic structure under guidelines suggested by the Secretary of Interior's Standards for "reconstructing non-surviving landscapes."
8. Include equestrian-friendly policies in town ordinances
9. Research and pursue alternative pedestrian routes to cross Cottonwood Wash.
10. Encourage new developments to incorporate planning for connecting to established pathways and trails.
11. Attractions from the Mission in the east to Sand Island in the west could be linked by non-motorized paths consistent with Bluff's character.
12. Establish and maintain partnerships with state and regional agencies to increase resource availability for current and future trail maintenance and continued development opportunities.

Bluff Airport

Current Conditions

Bluff Airport V66 has a 3000-foot paved runway with a 1500-foot dirt runoff situated on 71.77 acres of land. The property is leased from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The lease was transferred to the Town of Bluff from San Juan County in 2018. The lease contract with the BLM was renewed in 2025 for a 20-year period. As of 2025, the lease costs \$1,368 annually and is evaluated every 5 years, per contract. The Town owns the Hangar building, which currently houses four separate, rentable spaces. The airport has four developed tie downs outside the hangar and room for four-to-eight additional planes with their own tie downs.

The town has engaged with Jviation to provide engineering support for the Bluff Airport runway infrastructure projects. In 2023, the airport runway was resurfaced. The Utah Division of Aeronautics provides assessments, recommendations, and requirements for all Utah airports. One of the known upcoming projects for the Bluff Airport will require the runway to be completely reconstructed. The UDA has this project planned for 2029.

In 2025, the town adopted an airport overlay zone ordinance to adhere to state code regulations dictating land use considerations for adjacent property to the airport.

Planning Assumptions

1. The Bluff Airport will remain as a lease to the Town of Bluff.
2. The Town will continue to rent hangar space to private individuals, which will cover the costs of the BLM lease and annual, minor maintenance.
3. The airport will require extensive work on the runway to continue to meet Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations in 2029, and beyond.
4. Due to strict airport regulations at the federal level, the town must adhere to all land use requirements as set forth by the federal government and State of Utah.
5. Land surrounding the airport must also be regulated to adhere to federal land use requirements.
6. Additional funds for larger, capital projects can be obtained through grants and other funding sources.
7. The airport could be used to host events to drive economic impact such as fly-ins and shows.

Resulting Policies

1. Adhere to all federal and state regulations regarding land use for airport and airport influence areas and promptly enact ordinances to ensure public safety.
2. Coordinate with airport authorities and adjacent jurisdictions for consistent approach protection.
3. Support the airport overlay zone ordinance and ensure any future development within the overlay zone adheres to municipal, state, and federal regulation.
4. Coordinate with the State of Utah Division of Aeronautics on airport master planning and ongoing capital projects.
5. Continue working with an engineering firm familiar with airport construction and management to ensure infrastructure maintenance and developments are designed and constructed to standard.

Section 3: Economic Development

General Goal

Town of Bluff strives to support a diversified economic base, establish policies to support a remote workforce, support year-round, locally owned business opportunities, allow and balance access to seasonal and long-term housing options, and encourage precedence of art and culture within the community.

Industry

Current Conditions

The current economy of Bluff is largely based on seasonal tourism, and the majority of jobs are in hospitality (lodging, campgrounds, food service, and outdoor recreational tours), educational services, professional and scientific technical services, and public administration. Bluff experiences “peak season” tourism from March through early June and from August through October. Peak season tourism results in a significant increase in the number of individuals in town daily. Lodging and paid campground facilities can accommodate over 1200 visiting individuals; almost five times the residential population of Bluff.

The Town of Bluff has no definable commercial or retail center. Retail businesses primarily are located along a two-mile corridor of US 191, although some commercial enterprises can also be found in off-highway residential areas. The volunteer fire department, library, post office and community center are all located in the eastern, historic section of town. Service industries include a gas station/convenience store, restaurants, a coffee shop, front-desk hotels/motels, a number of nightly rental options, and RV parks. The San Juan River BLM put-in offers campsites with varying amenities. Several river- and land-guiding companies exist in Bluff also, as well as a branch of a County-wide credit union.

The year-round economy relies heavily on the governmental sector for employment and services. These services include elementary education and roads and highways. Related to the government sector is archaeological contracting and non-profit organizations. Adjacent and nearby Public Lands constitute a major driving force for stable employment, including Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and State Parks. Some construction generally occurs off-season, and several artists work in Bluff. However, the majority of Bluff’s workforce is tied to tourism and seasonal industry. Businesses in Bluff are often “owner/operated.” Some employees of businesses involved in energy development in the surrounding area live in Bluff.

The Town of Bluff issued over 40 business licenses in 2025 to brick and mortar and service-based businesses which conduct business within the incorporated boundaries. Bluff also recognizes San Juan County, Blanding City, and Monticello City business licenses, as authorized by an interlocal agreement signed in 2025.

Planning Assumptions

1. Commercial development interest in Bluff will continue to grow as tourism expands and Bluff gains visibility as a regional destination.
2. Seasonal tourism will remain central to Bluff’s economy, but diversification into year-round industries is necessary for long-term economic resilience.
3. Public lands, town green space and parks, river access, trails, and scenic open spaces will continue to be critical drivers of Bluff’s economy.

4. Expanding access to goods and services within Bluff (e.g., groceries, basic household needs, healthcare, repair services) will reduce resident out-migration and commuting to nearby towns.
5. Remote work, home-based businesses, and creative enterprises will become increasingly important with reliable fiber optic internet.
Collaboration with tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and regional partners will remain essential to Bluff's economic development.
Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and other environmentally compatible industries represent long-term opportunities.

Resulting Policies

1. Promote entrepreneurship and support locally owned businesses that align with Bluff's small-town character and conservation values.
2. Encourage the development of home-based businesses, sustainable agriculture, and non-polluting, small-scale industries compatible with neighboring uses.
3. Partner with regional educational institutions, nonprofits, and employers to provide training, apprenticeships, and job placement programs.
4. Encourage commercial development along or near US 191 while maintaining walkable, pedestrian-friendly connections between businesses and neighborhoods.
5. Encourage recognition of Bluff's cultural heritage in developing new businesses and related enterprises.
6. Support annual local festivals, events, and arts activities that strengthen the tourism economy and community identity.
7. Collaborate with tribal governments and surrounding communities to promote cultural events and tourism initiatives.
8. Support a market analysis survey of goods and services that have a realistic potential to spur small businesses in a concerted effort to serve the residents of the Town of Bluff (including but not limited to groceries, household supplies, medical services, vehicle repairs, haircuts, recycling, trash removal, etc.) and encourage residents who choose to open small businesses to provide these goods and services.
9. Encourage economic development that supports Bluff's conservation and sustainability goals, including renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and low-impact outdoor recreation.
10. Prioritize industries that create year-round employment opportunities and reduce reliance on seasonal tourism.

Housing

Current Conditions

Most homes in Bluff are single-family residences located on sizeable lots. Because Bluff does not have a centralized sewer system, homes rely on septic systems, which require adequate space for safe waste disposal and leach fields. This development pattern has helped preserve open space and the town's rural feel but also constrains density and limits opportunities for smaller, more affordable housing types such as townhomes or apartments.

Bluff faces a persistent shortage of affordable housing, particularly for moderate-income residents and the local workforce. Many employees must commute from nearby towns such as Montezuma Creek or from the rural areas around town, which creates challenges for businesses and adds transportation burdens to workers. The shortage has been worsened by the conversion of long-term rental and residential properties into short-term vacation rentals and other commercial uses. This shift reduces the availability of stable housing options for residents who wish to make Bluff their permanent home.

Housing costs in Bluff are high relative to incomes in the region. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as costing no more than 30% of gross household income, including utilities. By this standard, many Bluff residents are housing cost-burdened.

San Juan County Department of Economic Development conducted a Housing Study in 2024 through Points Consulting. The report included various metrics and details for most of the communities in San Juan County, including Bluff. According to their research, they reported the following for Bluff:

Number of Households: 127
Persons Per Household: 2.5
Median Income: \$46,640
Median Home Value: \$254,000

However, other reports indicate the average property value in Bluff is closer to \$410,000 (Data USA). Limited land for development, construction costs, and high demand for vacation or second homes contribute to the lack of affordable options.

Additionally, some of Bluff's existing housing stock is aging and in need of rehabilitation. Some units are substandard, lacking modern efficiency measures or requiring updates to meet current building and safety codes. Ensuring quality housing is a key step toward strengthening neighborhoods and retaining a stable, year-round population.

The 2023 Strategic Plan identified Affordable Housing as a critical area to focus on and encourages multiple actions from the town government and community to identify and mitigate housing availability issues.

Planning Assumptions

1. Tourism-driven demand for short-term rentals will reduce the availability of long-term housing unless ordinances are enforced.
2. Workforce housing will remain a challenge for local businesses, particularly restaurants, hospitality, and service industries.
3. Housing affordability will continue to be influenced by regional real estate markets and limited developable land in Bluff.
4. A balanced housing strategy must protect existing neighborhoods, preserve Bluff's small-town character, and expand opportunities for moderate-income residents.
5. Rehabilitation and maintenance of existing homes will be as important as new housing construction.
6. Regional collaboration with nonprofits, housing authorities, and state/federal agencies will be necessary to secure funding and technical support for affordable housing initiatives.
7. Energy-efficient housing and use of native landscaping can reduce long-term costs for residents while aligning with Bluff's conservation values.

Resulting Policies

1. Develop a Housing Task Force to conduct further research on housing and ordinances in rural areas which support affordable housing.
2. Encourage employers to support local affordable housing (rentals and ownership) for their workforces.
3. Adopt development standards that maintain Bluff's identity, scale, and small-town feel.

4. Ensure zoning and other ordinances to protect residential areas from inappropriate non-residential encroachment.
5. Facilitate a reasonable opportunity for a variety of housing, including moderate-income housing and multi-family housing to meet the needs of people desiring to live, benefit from, and fully participate in all aspects of neighborhood and community life.
6. Create a building code enforcement program to bring substandard units into compliance and improve overall housing conditions.
7. Identify potential areas of blight that may affect the community and establish goals and standards for the improvement of these areas or structures.
8. Encourage the development of long-term rental units.
9. Provide information for property owners regarding housing rehabilitation methods, resources, and safety inspections.
10. Encourage the upkeep, maintenance, and rehabilitation of existing housing in town.
11. Encourage the creation of housing development which is sensitive to natural resources and environmental constraints and is energy efficient.
12. Promote energy-efficient construction, retrofits, and the use of renewable energy in residential development.
13. Evaluate adding requirements for affordable housing components in large development projects.

Work Force

Current Conditions

Residents of Bluff, and indeed of many communities along and south of the San Juan River, frequently travel to larger towns such as Blanding, Utah or Cortez, Colorado for employment, supplies, services, food variety, and lower-cost goods. While Bluff has a growing number of businesses in tourism, hospitality, food service, retail, and professional services, the local job base remains relatively small compared to the demand for services.

The median household income in Bluff was \$53,973 in 2023. While this figure is higher than in some surrounding rural communities, it lags behind state and national averages. Employment opportunities in Bluff are often seasonal, part-time, or service-based, leading many residents to rely on multiple income streams.

Bluff businesses employ many individuals from surrounding communities, including residents of the Navajo Nation, White Mesa, Blanding, and Montezuma Creek. More than 80 percent of the workforce commutes into Bluff daily and do not live in town, largely due to limited housing availability and affordability. This creates challenges for employee retention and for businesses that rely on consistent staffing.

Bluff also has a sizable retirement community and a growing population of remote workers, supported by the arrival of fiber optic internet in 2021. Remote work provides opportunities for diversification of the economy and for attracting new residents, but it also highlights the need for modern housing options, reliable utilities, and amenities that appeal to professionals and families.

Planning Assumptions

1. A sustainable workforce requires a broad range of housing options, including affordable rentals and moderate-income homeownership opportunities.
2. Seasonal and tourism-driven employment will remain a cornerstone of Bluff's economy, but diversification into professional, cultural, and remote-work opportunities will improve stability.

3. Workforce shortages will persist unless housing, transportation, and community infrastructure are addressed together.
4. Regional collaboration with nearby communities and tribal nations will continue to be essential, as Bluff's labor market is deeply interconnected with its neighbors.
5. Remote work will remain an economic opportunity for Bluff if the town invests in housing, amenities, and infrastructure to attract and retain professional telecommuters.
6. Training and workforce development, particularly for young residents and underemployed populations, can help match local skills with local employment needs.

Resulting Policies

1. Align workforce development goals with housing strategies to ensure that employees can both work and live in Bluff.
2. Support business development beyond tourism, including professional services, arts, education, technology, and cultural enterprises.
3. Promote Bluff as a destination for remote workers by maintaining reliable internet access, coworking opportunities, and a high quality of life.
4. Partner with regional colleges, workforce training programs, and tribal organizations to provide education and skills training relevant to Bluff's economy.
5. Encourage apprenticeship, mentorship, and youth training programs to retain younger residents and connect them with local employment opportunities.
6. Coordinate with surrounding communities and tribal governments to address shared workforce challenges, including transportation, housing, and training.
7. Explore regional transportation solutions to support commuting employees, such as ridesharing programs or shuttle partnerships.
8. Support workforce policies within the town government that strengthen year-round employment opportunities rather than solely seasonal or short-term jobs.

Agriculture

Current Conditions

Ranching occurs on private and public lands both within and adjacent to Bluff boundaries, with livestock often moved from higher elevations in the County to winter along the river. Bluff is home to a hay farm that supplies feed to many small livestock concerns in the southern county. Agriculture is not a large part of the town's economy and we do not have any Agricultural Protection Areas.

Planning Assumptions

1. Agriculture, ranching, and grazing will continue to be economically and culturally important.
2. Preserving farmland from sprawl can have additional benefits, like protecting natural resources, enhancing biodiversity, and mitigating climate change.
3. A substantial portion of the land within the Town of Bluff limits is comprised of public lands owned and administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Utah.

Resulting Policies

1. Support agricultural endeavors.
2. Emphasizes optimizing water use in agriculture, ranching, and grazing.
3. Promote soil conservation on agricultural lands through mapping, grant funding, and informational literature.

Section 4: Heritage and Historic Preservation

General Goal

Preserve the character of the historical and prehistoric elements and historically classified structures.

Current Conditions

The town of Bluff acknowledges that it sits on the traditional lands of Indigenous People. See https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B_CAyH4WUfQXTXo3MjZHRC00ajg/view.

Several indigenous places have been documented in the vicinity of Bluff including the prehistoric Bluff Pueblo I village below the Navajo Twins, the Bluff Great House site on Cemetery Hill, and “Meloy Village,” a Basketmaker III pithouse village in the sand dunes west of Cottonwood Wash. A historic Ute camp has been documented west of the Navajo Twins, and Ute and Navajo camps have been documented in Cottonwood Wash and near Sand Island. Navajo and Ute rock art is abundant on the Bluff Sandstone and Navajo Sandstone cliffs and boulders within the town and beyond.

The Bluff City Historic District, including Cemetery Hill, is north/west of Highway 191, east of Cottonwood Wash and up to the Bluff cliffs. Several homes and properties within the District are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A more detailed description of these homes is in the Appendix.

Planning Assumptions

1. The preservation of Bluff's historic structures and sites is an ongoing process.
2. Structures and sites that merit preservation should be identified and inventoried.
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission will work with local, state, and federal historic preservation agencies to understand and preserve the historic significance of the town.

Resulting Policies

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission, Bluff Town Council, and citizens will work together to develop a plan for the preservation of Bluff historic sites.
2. The Planning and Zoning Commission will work with local historic preservation organizations to inventory prehistoric, historical or culturally significant sites for preservation.
3. Heritage tourism shall be in compliance with all ordinances and applicable public land regulations
4. Upgrades and renovations, where applicable, should consider Utah Historic Preservation guidelines.
5. Promote archaeological preservation and an archeological designation. Encourage local partnerships to survey cultural resources on private property.
6. Develop ordinances, in consultation with the Utah State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), to mitigate potential adverse effects to cultural resources and human remains caused by ground-disturbing activities in public facilities and rights-of-way, in accord with applicable state and federal laws.
7. Support a map of archaeological overlay zone throughout Town boundaries, identifying areas of archaeological sensitivity.
8. Support the creation of recommendations for private landowners who find archaeologically sensitive sites within their properties.

Section 5: Health, Safety, & Infrastructure

General Goal

The town government can sustainably provide services for the public and ensure the services provided can match the community's growth.

Services include general governance, enforcement, water utility, road maintenance, fire, emergency medical services, and law enforcement.

Similar to many other small municipalities, securing long-term interlocal agreements with San Juan County, the State of Utah, or other outside entities should be evaluated and implemented to ensure a robust and sustainable level of service.

Municipal Property and Infrastructure

Current Conditions

The Town of Bluff owns multiple municipal buildings, parks, and infrastructure.

Bluff Community Center and Fire Mesa Kitchen – 190 N. 3rd E Street, Bluff, UT 84512; Parcel C00000090010

Set on 4 acres of property in the heart of East Bluff, the community center building and grounds are the primary meeting place for town-hosted functions including town meetings, public events, and can also be rented out by the public. The main building totals 6,000 square feet and includes an auditorium, space rented to San Juan County for the Bluff Senior Center services, is home to the town offices, and also holds the emergency food pantry.

Fire Mesa Kitchen was constructed next to the community center building in (insert year), and provides a community kitchen space for rentals. The property also features a playground, outdoor pavilion, and baseball diamond.

Cooperative Cultural Center – 630 E Black Locust, Bluff, UT 84512; Parcels C00000010020 and C00000010010

The CCC building was jointly purchased by the Town of Bluff and non-profit partner in 2021 from San Juan School District. The 19,000 square foot former elementary school building sits on 4 acres of property, right on Main Street. The building is dated and currently undergoing renovations to transform the space into a future community meeting space, office spaces for the town of bluff and/or rentable spaces, business incubator, as well as workforce childcare center and potentially other community-centric resources. Funding for the project has been difficult to secure. In 2025, the partnership between the town and the non-profit was closed out, and the town assumed full ownership and rights to the building and property.

West Park – 500 block of West Main Street; Parcel C00290150000

West Park is a small-town park, inherited from the Bluff Service Area upon incorporation, that features shade structures, picnic tables, sculptures and art. The park is located on the north side of Main Street in west Bluff. Annual maintenance includes irrigation for the trees.

Bar Well - 500 block of Rabbit Brush Avenue; Parcel C00290200160

The Bar Well property, located at _____ was inherited by the Town of Bluff from the Bluff Service Area upon incorporation. The property is _____ acres. The name comes from the "bar" well. The town holds the water rights to the well.

Class C Roads

The Town of Bluff is responsible for all town, “Class C” roads. More information can be found in the Transportation Section of the plan.

Bluff Water Rights

The Town of Bluff holds ____ water rights and ____ secondary water rights. As of 2025, Bluff Water Works Special Service District, which is jurisdictionally overseen by San Juan County, is the culinary water utility.

Bluff Cemetery

Planning Assumptions

1. Bluff will prioritize infrastructure upgrades and maintenance to meet community needs.
2. These projects will be tracked on the Capital Improvements Project Plan (CIP), as approved annually by the Bluff Town Council.
3. The Town of Bluff receives Class C Roads funds to maintain and improve the town-owned roads in Bluff.
4. The town has volunteers and paid staff to help manage town owned properties and facilities.

Resulting Policies

1. Capital Improvement Projects should align with Strategic Plan initiatives, specifically focused on the timelines identified in the Strategic Plan.
2. Identify and pursue various funding sources for large projects including the CCC renovation project and road improvement.
3. Consider a 24/7 public restroom facility and consider composting toilet options.

Emergency Services & Law Enforcement

Current Conditions

San Juan County provides Fire, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Law Enforcement to Town of Bluff through the Interlocal Agreement. 911 calls originating in the area are received by Price Dispatch. US 191 is patrolled by Utah Highway Patrol as well as the San Juan County Sheriff’s Office. They will respond when called to events that are within their jurisdiction. It is important to note that the deputies must have a town or state code to enforce.

The Bluff Volunteer Fire Department (BVFD) has a crew of volunteers who respond to calls in Bluff as well as provide mutual aid in surrounding areas reaching Montezuma Creek, Monument Valley, north to White Mesa, and south to Arizona. All of the fire departments in the county provide and receive mutual aid as needed. BVFD responds to emergencies including traffic accidents and wildland, structure and industrial fires, and assists the County in search and rescue. Bluff Fire can also assist with helicopters landing for EMS air transport on scene or by fixed wing airplanes at the airport. San Juan County owns the fire station and the seven emergency response vehicles which are at the volunteers’ disposal to use when responding to calls. The County also provides communication for BVFD with radios and pagers and they activate the local siren in conjunction with a page. The County has also placed a local Base Station at Recapture Lodge to facilitate communication directly with the Sheriff’s Office and the EMS and Fire crews and to ensure activation of pagers.

Bluff EMS has a limited crew of Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT’s) who are paid when called to an emergency. The County-owned ambulance is housed in Bluff at the fire station. As of May 2025,

due to the limited number of trained EMTs in Bluff, the department is no longer able to transport patients via ambulance. They are able to respond to calls and provide on-scene care while they wait for a transporting vehicle team to arrive.

Planning Assumptions

1. The Town will strive to provide citizens and visitors of Bluff with a safe and pleasant environment in which to live, work and play.
2. The Town of Bluff has limited human capital to provide all emergency service requirements.
3. Historically, many positions, including health and human safety/emergency services have been volunteer positions.
4. The Town has prioritized emergency services in the Strategic Plan.
5. The surrounding region has high-quality emergency service providers including San Juan County, the City of Blanding, and private entities such as Utah Navajo Health System in Montezuma Creek and Blanding.
6. San Juan County employs full time law enforcement deputies who have jurisdiction throughout the county, including within the Town of Bluff.
7. The Town will continue to sign interlocal agreements with the State of Utah to provide Wildland Fire Protection to the incorporated boundaries.

Resulting Policies

1. Continue to lead and encourage fire mitigation and monitor fuel buildup throughout the incorporated boundaries, with specific focus on the San Juan River flood plain.
2. Incentivize volunteer participation in and training for fire and EMT services.
3. Establish generous setbacks along washes in any future development.
4. Continue participation in the Cooperative Wildfire System through the Utah Department of Natural Resources to plan for, mitigate against, and recover from catastrophic fire potential.
5. Research risks and pass a resolution to mitigate risk from the transportation of toxic materials such as uranium through Bluff.
6. Encourage ranchers to maintain fencing.
7. Consider policies pertaining to animal control and ownership.
8. Consider policies pertaining to firearm safety.
9. Provide and maintain high-quality effectiveness and efficiency in law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services to the extent that is consistent with governmental operations, plans, public policies, resident and tourist populations served, and remains within available funding.
10. Develop and enforce safety and fire protection regulations for all commercial, residential, industrial, and public development.

Section 6: Development Constraints

General Goals

Preserve and enhance Bluff as a scenic, rural community that appreciates, uses, enjoys, and protects its distinctive environment.

Plan in response to water limitations, geographic hazards, conservation needs, and other restraints for the benefit of current and future generations.

Water

Current Conditions

The culinary water system for the Town of Bluff consists of several artesian wells which tap into the Navajo "N" Aquifer, a treatment plant, three storage tanks, and a culinary water delivery system. As of 2025, the culinary water is managed by Bluff Water Works Special Service District (BWW) by a board appointed by San Juan County. The board meets monthly to discuss the water system and routine maintenance, as well as emergency repairs are conducted by members of their board, as well as by a paid water technician.

Culinary water reports are issued annually by BWW. In 2005, a water treatment plant was installed to remove contaminants including arsenic, which is present in the water, especially at certain well sites and during specific times of year.

Current infrastructure has constraints which limit the culinary water system's ability to supply water over certain elevation levels without installing additional pumps.

Bluff does not have a wastewater treatment process; most residential and commercial properties utilize septic systems to collect wastewater. As of 2025, there is one private wastewater treatment facility which supports that specific business's operations.

The Town of Bluff holds the water rights to the wells in the town that supply the culinary water. There are also secondary water rights to the San Juan River.

Planning Assumptions

1. Research historical water use.
2. Research maximum water taps culinary water sources can supply and develop policy based on current conditions.
3. Research alternative means and methods for alternative water sources (eg. emergency sources like the river).
4. Promote water collection and reuse methods.
5. Promote xeriscaping best practices for residential, community, and commercial properties. Encourage landscaping to conserve water.
6. Town-owned properties should integrate water-wise landscaping standards to reduce water usage.
7. Promote water conservation for primary and secondary sources.
8. Research water rights and State law applicable to the Town of Bluff for the purposes of secondary water use.
9. Research utilizing the impounded artesian ("Pioneer Swimming Pond") north of Community Center as a water collection station.
10. Identify risks to current culinary water sources.

11. The policy will remain up to date with current water supply conditions and risks to water supplies.
12. Assess the aquifer to better understand the water situation and limitations.

Resulting Policies

1. Ensure infrastructure provides reliable, safe, and cost-effective water service.
2. Ensure policy allows for reliable, safe, and cost-effective wastewater disposal and/or storage.
3. Create mechanisms, including ordinances or other methods, to effectively evaluate future or planned development impact on water usage.
4. Seek Environmental Protection Agency sole source aquifer designation for the “N” Aquifer.
5. Develop ordinances for wastewater
6. Improve stormwater management, including rainwater usage.
7. Encourage water conservation methods on residential and commercial properties.
8. Consider conservation ordinances for new culinary taps and commercial water uses.
9. Encourage developers to improve infrastructure.
10. Support water reuse, conservation, greywater use, and collection.
11. Support a public water filling station to minimize single-use containers.
12. Incorporate recommendations from completed water studies and best practices for water-wise landscaping for all municipal-owned properties.

Preservation of Natural and Open Spaces

Current Conditions

The public lands surrounding Bluff offer outstanding opportunities for hiking, hunting, horseback riding, biking, heritage tourism, and more. The preservation of the natural environment and open space is one of the overriding concerns of Bluff’s citizens. The General Plan recognizes the importance of the natural environment and the numerous benefits of preserving Bluff’s open space from development; maintaining the viability of productive land; maintaining scenic value and viewsheds; protecting the quality of culinary and irrigation water; managing stormwater, protecting biodiversity; and encouraging sustainable development.

The Town of Bluff owns and manages multiple parks within the incorporated boundaries including the Bluff Community Center grounds, West Park, Bar Well Park.

The Wildlands Conservancy secured 320 acres of property in Cottonwood Wash, protecting it as their 24th preserve area, and their first acquisition in the state of Utah.

The Bluff River Trail has been an ongoing project and is referenced in the Transportation section of this Plan.

Planning Assumptions

1. Parks and recreation areas can preserve open spaces in town and be a community benefit.
2. Areas can be selected for community information kiosks and safe, public use.
3. Open space areas need to be identified and planned for prior to the development of undeveloped areas within Bluff.

Resulting Policies

1. Establish a formal Parks and Recreation department to coordinate planning, construction, and maintenance of public trails, open space, and parks.
2. Develop a plan for West Park and Bar Well properties.

3. Enhance town green space and develop parks, trails, access to public land, river access points, picnic sites, and a water station.
4. Partner with other community entities to support existing open space preservation efforts.
5. Promote the retention of open space to preserve significant sensitive lands, to provide land use buffers, and to provide for public safety. Steep hillsides and ridgelines should be protected as view areas or vistas and not be developed.
6. Promote appropriate design and landscaping of the town park, town grounds, municipal buildings, and other municipal open space to meet the needs of the community.
7. To preserve agricultural land and contiguous open space, encourage clustering, perimeter development, and site-sensitive design.
8. Encourage public lands to be zoned as open spaces, while allowing limited development for the benefit of the community.

Restrictive Geography

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines “geography” as: “a science that deals with the description, distribution, and interaction of the diverse physical, biological, and cultural features of the earth’s surface.” Bluff’s physical, biological, and cultural features are considered below.

Physical Geology Features: Geology, Soils, and Hydrology

Geography

Current Conditions

A detailed description of the geology of the Bluff valley can be found in Appendix D. Known geological hazards include rockfalls and talus slope failure along the base of the cliffs formed by Bluff Sandstone, the Wanakah Formation, and Entrada Sandstone. Exposed faces of Bluff Sandstone have spalled off, and slumped down onto steep talus slopes on the valley floor. To the west, the exposed faces of the Navajo, Kayenta, and Wingate Formations along Comb Ridge have generated large spalls that have fallen onto US Highway 191. Talus slopes are unstable deposits that may shift downslope or fail when the critical angle of repose exceeds 33° - 37°, if the toe of the slope is removed. Moisture also adds to the overall mass of the slope and thus increases the downward gravitational force on the slope.

See Appendix for additional information.

Planning Assumptions

1. Protect residents and property, and prevent public costs associated with development in geologically hazardous areas.

Resulting Policies

1. Restrict development in areas that present natural hazards to human life, property, and natural resources.
2. Develop and enforce regulations for developments in hazardous areas. Require a geotechnical study and report for commercial developments within hazardous areas, that will address how effects from rockfalls and disturbed talus slope runouts will be mitigated.
3. Define a minimum distance from the toes of talus slopes for the safe placement of structures to prevent potential rockslide damage to buildings and people.
4. Establish policies governing the removal and/or stabilization of rocks and soils from talus slopes, to prevent erosion and subsequent rock slippage and mudslides.
5. Encourage development, grading, and landscaping to be in harmony with the natural topography and major landforms in the planning area.

Soils

Current Conditions

Most soils in and around Bluff are moderately to highly erodible by either wind or water.

Soils: Planning Assumptions

1. Obtain geologic and soils maps to include with other maps of the Town of Bluff.
2. Identify soils that warrant conservation (e.g., farmlands, wetlands, riparian corridors, and the like).
3. Identify currently active gravel quarries. Identify the distribution of sandy gravel deposits suitable for development as sand and gravel pits.
4. Identify soils that are most susceptible to wind and water erosion.
5. Allow current uses of soils to continue, while maintaining policies for soils health and human health and safety.

Resulting Policies

1. Encourage conservation of viable soils for general ecological health.
2. Develop specific policies to mitigate wind and water erosion of viable soils.
3. Encourage responsible livestock grazing to conserve soil cover, enhance native vegetation, and discourage noxious weeds.
4. Monitor gravel extraction activities to ensure consideration of human health and safety.
5. Encourage reclamation of depleted, non-operating, gravel quarries.

Hydrology

Current Conditions

San Juan River and associated tributaries, including Cow Canyon, Calf Canyon, Cottonwood Wash, Butler Wash, Comb Wash, and numerous unnamed Washes

Historically, the San Juan River flooded almost yearly, contributing to an extensive riparian habitat along the floodplain. Water releases from Navajo Dam are currently maintained at a minimum flow to fulfill agricultural-related water usage rights and to maintain viable habitat for the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

Bluff Sandstone aquifer

This is an unconfined aquifer and is the source for seeps and springs located between the upper Bluff Sandstone and the lower, impermeable, Wanakah Formation.

Navajo Sandstone aquifer (confined culinary water source)

The 2019 Bluff Water study provides descriptive and historical information on the aquifer.

Bluff Storm Water Control Project

In 2016-2019, storm water control facilities were constructed in East Bluff and West Bluff.

Hydrological Hazards

A major hazard in Bluff is flooding from the San Juan River and upstream tributaries. Although major flooding appears to be remote with Navajo Dam and other diversions, there are at least an additional fourteen (14) named large tributaries draining into the San Juan River below the dam (see Appendix D, Table A-1). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has not created any updated floodplain maps for Bluff or any nearby areas.

Tributaries within the Bluff incorporated area include: St. Christopher's Mission Wash, Cow Canyon, and Calf Canyon. Flooding from Calf Canyon has been partially mitigated by a large streambed

modification project. Recent observations (May 2019) demonstrate that the heads (upslope ends) of the drainage culverts, and the large catchment basin, are beginning to silt up.

Cottonwood Wash flows through the middle of Bluff and effectively bisects the town. In 1968 a large flood surged down Cottonwood Wash and took out the US-163/191 bridge across the wash.

The sand dune field west of West Bluff is cut by three (3) large gully systems that drain off Tank Mesa: Buck Wash (draining into the BLM Sand Island Campground), "Gravel Pit Wash," (which runs through an old gravel quarry, thence through a culvert beneath US 191), and an unnamed wash originating from Tank Mesa and entering the town west of the present Desert Rose Resort (see Geological Hazards map). Concentration of natural runoff below ditches and culverts can be erosive on downstream properties. Erosion has occurred at the mouths of stormwater ditches where they end at the tops of slopes (Gillam, personal communication, May 2019),

Recent mining reclamation and oil extraction activities upstream from Bluff have, respectively, caused the release of toxic mine wastewater from the Gold King Mine in Colorado (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2015), and crude oil from an Elk Petroleum pipeline (San Juan Record 2019), into the San Juan River (San Juan River 2019). Upstream wastewater treatment plants, mine tailings, and oil seeps contribute additional pollutants to the San Juan River. See Appendix for additional information.

Planning Assumptions

1. Establish a historic timeline of Bluff flood events. Update this information on an annual basis to enable people to prepare for future flood events.
2. Investigate the potential to place additional boom anchors along the San Juan River upstream from Bluff to mitigate adverse effects from oil spills.
3. Coordinate with the Utah Department of Environmental Quality and other agencies to develop appropriate emergency response plans to mitigate the effects of toxic mine wastewater spills and oil spills into the San Juan River.
4. The 2019 Bluff Water Study will identify potential hazards to the Navajo Sandstone aquifer (source of Bluff's culinary water).

Resulting Policies

1. Develop policies that consider the potential impact of a San Juan River flood level maximum on soils, vegetation, wildlife, and structures.
2. Continue to monitor and maintain Bluff's current stormwater control facilities, adjusting for revisions and updates as needed.
3. Continue to cooperate with state and federal agencies to mitigate the effects of oil and mine wastewater spills into the San Juan River and its tributaries.
4. Attend public hearings regarding commercial and industrial development that may affect Bluff's Bluff Sandstone and Navajo Sandstone aquifers.
5. Ensure residential, commercial, and industrial compliance with state and federal guidelines governing the protection of the Bluff Sandstone and Navajo Sandstone aquifers.
6. Develop policies to ensure that landowners do not develop properties in ways that would result in excavated soil and rock materials falling or washing onto neighboring properties, or that would change the location and amount of surface water flowing from their property onto neighboring properties (e.g., wash channelization).

Biological Features: Vegetation and Wildlife

Current Conditions

The riparian corridor along the banks of the San Juan River supports a variety of native plants and animals, including galleries of Fremont Cottonwood, and thickets of Coyote Willow. Side canyons host sensitive species like Cliff Flower and Monkey Flower as well as high desert plants like Mormon Tea, and Single-leaf Ash. The riparian zone provides stopover and/or nesting sites for migratory waterfowl such as Great Blue Heron, Sandhill Crane, White-faced Ibis, Canada Goose, and a variety of duck species. It also provides critical habitat for the endangered Southwest Willow Flycatcher and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Other neotropical migrants include Turkey Vulture, Summer Tanager, Northern Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, Black-chinned Hummingbird, and many others. The river and its backwaters provide critical habitat and migratory routes for the endangered Colorado Pikeminnow, Razorback Sucker and other non-endangered fish species. The river floodplain, the cliffs and highlands within the town limits are home to many reptile and amphibian species plus numerous mammals and birds including mule deer, porcupine, raccoon, turkey, raven, coyote, foxes, rabbit, bats, skunk, beaver, rodents and a variety of raptors, owls and cliff swallows. Cougar, Bobcats, and Black Bear are occasional visitors. Critical Wildlife Corridors include the San Juan River and the connected washes and canyons that are tributary to the river.

A host of noxious, invasive, non-native species have come to dominate many areas since European settlement. Along with many others, Russian Olive, Tamarisk, Russian Knapweed, Camelthorn, and Goathead are officially included on the State of Utah Noxious Weed List. By State Law (Rule R68-9, Utah Noxious Weed Act) counties are tasked with weed management and counties then work with federal, state, municipal and private landowners.

Planning Assumptions

1. Planning must account for threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and wildlife corridors, in accordance with Federal and Utah State Code.

Resulting Policies

1. Consult with state and federal wildlife managers to identify wildlife corridors and critical wildlife habitat areas (Sources: Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service). Generate maps to aid in planning.
2. Restrict development within identified riparian zones and critical wildlife habitat areas.
3. Encourage the preservation of areas critical to local wildlife as habitats and migration corridors.

Cultural Features

Current Conditions

Bluff's cultural features include Prehistoric Indigenous sites and Historic sites (Indigenous and Anglo-American) that are protected by Federal and State laws.

Planning Assumptions

1. Cultural resources will be found within development areas and guidelines will be created to protect them.

Resulting Policies

1. Identify sources of funding and assistance to mitigate impacts to significant cultural resources affected by development.

2. Encourage a site stewardship ethic for significant cultural resources that occur on private lands.
3. Identify appropriate “hardened” sites in the Bluff area for visitation and education.
4. To the extent allowable by law, create generalized overlay maps to identify areas of prehistoric and historic significance, to guide planning decisions and ordinances.

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Section 7 Enforcement

General Goal

Establish effective enforcement of municipal ordinances including building code, land use, and other municipal laws. While enforcement has been limited in the past, Utah law provides the Town with clear authority to act. By creating a consistent, fair, and accessible system, Bluff can ensure that growth and development protect community values, property, views, and the environment while applying rules predictably and without favoritism.

Current Conditions

Prior to incorporation, Bluff did not have the authority nor resources to enforce ordinances such as zoning and building codes. While San Juan County was the governing body of unincorporated Bluff prior to 2018, the county often overlooked building code inspections, land use, and other regulations deemed unimportant or not of priority to the greater county.

The Town of Bluff hired a Building Inspector / Building Official in 2025 upon adoption of a building code ordinance. This part-time, paid position enforces building code-specific regulations. The role, as defined by the state, requires a substantial amount of training, certifications, and regulation to ensure health and human safety.

Planning Assumptions

1. Some landowners prefer to reside in rural locations like Bluff precisely because zoning regulations were historically lax or nonexistent.
2. Providing enforcement where none took place previously is challenging for the enforcing body, as well as the public.
3. Establishing a clear, step-by-step process for ordinance enforcement will provide expectations for the enforcing body, as well as the public.
4. The Building Official, a part-time paid position, will enforce the town's building code, as required by Utah State law.
5. The town should have a separate role assigned to enforce ordinances other than the building code to ensure laws are being followed.
6. Most enforcement elements should not be handled by the sheriff or deputies; Bluff is better served by an Ordinance Enforcement Officer who can act as both a community liaison and an authority figure.
7. Enforcement can be more challenging to conduct in a small town, as many residents know their neighbors and the social pressure of correcting a friend or neighbor can be uncomfortable.
8. Enforcement must be consistent, predictable, and fair to encourage cooperation and prevent perceptions of favoritism.

Resulting Policies

1. Hire/appoint an Ordinance Enforcement Officer.
2. Develop and adopt an enforcement ordinance to define the basic, tiered process and procedures to enforce Bluff's ordinances.
3. Ensure a robust public participation and hearing process during the drafting of an enforcement ordinance to improve public understanding of why and how enforcement will be conducted.
4. Reference the approved enforcement ordinance in current and future ordinances.
5. Develop standardized compliant/concern forms, as well as educational materials about enforcement processes.

6. Make the standardized documents referenced above readily available to the public through printed and online methods.
7. Standardized forms (complaints, letters, process outlines) should be created and made available both in print and online to the public.

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Section 8: Implementation

General Goal

The Town of Bluff will use this General Plan as a living guide for decision-making, directing growth, land use, infrastructure, and community programs in a way that reflects shared values. Bluff is committed to steadily implementing the plan's policies and action steps, updating them as conditions change, and ensuring that each element works together to support a vibrant, resilient, and well-managed community.

Current Conditions

Bluff has multiple planning documents including this General Plan, a Long-Term Strategic Plan spanning through 2028, an Active Transportation Plan, as well as a Capital Improvement Plan which is evaluated annually during the budgeting cycle. Planning initiatives take place regularly and include a variety of perspectives from elected leadership as well as appointed boards and the general public.

Planning Assumptions

1. The General Plan, while required by Utah State Code, embodies the overall direction of the town.
2. Town council will utilize the General Plan document, in unison with other planning documents to prioritize work and the strategic direction of municipal governance.
3. The Town of Bluff has developed and will continue to update a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
4. The CIP and Strategic Plan present a prioritized list of projects for the town government.
5. The Town of Bluff has a relatively small annual budget which requires prioritization of projects and initiatives.

Resulting Policies

1. The Town will conduct updates to the General Plan every five years, unless required sooner by Utah code.
2. All elected and appointed officials shall read the General Plan within the first thirty (30) calendar days of their term.
3. Town officials shall consider the recommendations and priorities set out in the General Plan, Strategic Plan, and other planning documents when assessing annual budget allocations.
4. The town council will assess the timelines for all initiatives laid out in the strategic plan. Make regular updates and steady investments in the recommended capital improvement project list.
5. Establish realistic budgets and timeframes for the expansion and maintenance of all public facilities and services within Bluff.
6. Provide balance between new areas of development and existing areas of the community.

Appendices

Town Boundary Map (2019)

Bluff Incorporation Feasibility Study (2016)

Listening to Bluff Study (2016)

Restrictive Geology Report (2019)

Historic Homes and Places including Bluff City Historic District nomination form

<https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/SearchResults/0fd66a30c2ee41a4bd0039465cae712e?view=list>

USU Study (2019)

Overlay Zones/Historic Preservation Areas Map (forthcoming)

Zoning Districts Maps (Full Map, East Bluff, West Bluff)

Town of Bluff Class C Roads Map

Active Transportation Plan

Transportation Corridor Map

Future Land Use Map (2025)

Engineering Water Study