



# Floor Area Ratio and Net Parcel

Focus Group Summary

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## Overview

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and Net Parcel were tools identified in the Community Growth Advisory Committee's (CGAC) *Final Report of Recommendations* to achieve Pitkin County's climate action goals. To determine how these tools should be implemented as part of Vision 2050, the county recommended additional analysis to understand how adjustments to FAR and Net Parcel might support goals to limit material waste, protect natural resources and preserve community character. Part of this analysis included hosting a Focus Group on October 16, 2024 with local experts in the design and planning community.

The meeting included Pitkin County Planning, Zoning and Engineering staff and focused on the CGAC's recommendations specific to Net Parcel and FAR, current experience utilizing County code and troubleshooting parts of the code that present challenges throughout the application process. In total, there were seventeen (17) participants in the Focus Group, both in person and online, representing several design and planning firms across Pitkin County.

### CGAC Background and Recommendations

There are a total of nine recommendations in the CGAC Report related to the implementation of FAR and a Net Parcel calculation. These recommendations were made to ensure development responds to the specific conditions of an individual site, and include:

1. Implement a FAR sliding scale to remaining unregulated zone districts currently without a floor area ratio, notwithstanding non-conforming parcels that may result.
2. Utilize the current FAR sliding scale in AR-2 zone district as the starting point for determining sliding scales for zone districts currently without a floor area ratio.\* *allowable floor area may not exceed the house size square footage cap, as recommended by this Committee.*
3. Implement a slope area calculation to net parcel size with the initial framework below. Develop case studies prior to implementation to determine the optimal formula.
4. Net parcel size reductions for slope:
  - Areas of a parcel with 0% to 30% slope: No (0%) reduction
  - Areas of a parcel with 30-45% slope: 25% reduction
  - Areas of a parcel with a slope of more than 45%: 50% reduction
  - All areas under water are excluded from the calculation as these are not actually buildable areas.
5. Under no circumstance will the amount of net parcel size be reduced by more than 25% due to areas with steep slopes.
6. Special consideration will be given to existing slope reduction formulas within already established PUDs or subdivisions that incorporate large open spaces (e.g., Meadowood).
7. Consider how existing PUD approvals will be addressed related to floor area ratio recommendations.

8. Allowable floor area INCLUDES habitable basement. The current basement exemption is removed (excluding crawl space as defined by code) and replaced with a subgrade floor area bonus (see below).
9. Create a Subgrade Floor Area Bonus (basement) of up to 1000 sq ft above the allowable floor area (not to exceed house size cap) in the UGB only. Requires TDR with special review.

## Focus Group Discussion Key Findings

- Focus on Simplification and Consistency. Many comments emphasized simplifying regulations, such as consolidating floor area limits and avoiding excessive complexity, especially regarding exemptions. The goal is to create clearer, more straightforward guidelines that can be easily implemented across different areas and property types. The current base maximum floor area of 5,750 square feet for many zone districts is considered more straight-forward to understand and implement compared to the existing FAR zone districts. The Net Parcel Reduction recommendation has the potential to further complicate the existing regulatory standards.
- FAR Sliding Scale. Participants were generally not supportive of applying a sliding-scale County-wide with many expressing hesitations around non-conforming properties and the need to better understand how this would affect future development; however, there was consensus that FAR is a valuable tool and likely can be applied successfully in a more targeted manner. Participants also recognized that zoning, and not just lot sizes, creates challenges in meeting regulations due to previous subdivisions not conforming with underlying zoning.
- Site Coverage. In the case study review, the concept of site coverage regulations surfaced as an alternative strategy to achieve the same intent behind the FAR and Net Parcel Reduction CGAC recommendations. Participants discussed using site coverage as a tool to reduce development impacts and agreed that for large properties that feature expanses of developable area it could be effective.
- Net Parcel Area/Slope Reductions. Participants highlighted the complexity that would be added to the application pre-submittal work with the inclusion of a Net Parcel Area / Slope Reductions both from an administrative and cost perspective. Participants highlighted the need to work / discuss with surveyors to better understand how best to define slope anomalies and identify ideal grids for surveying.
- Exemptions and Their Impact. Participants debated the need for revising or eliminating certain floor area exemptions. Participants expressed mixed opinions on whether exemptions were helpful or were further complicating the system, suggesting a need for more consistent standards, particularly with mechanical spaces and energy-related storage.
- Learning from Case Studies and Regional Practices. A review of case studies from Colorado and other states highlighted that many counties already implement tools like the ones under discussion, such as maximum house sizes and net parcel definitions. There was an expressed interest in diving deeper into how Teton County applies its slope and parcel regulations to potentially refine existing codes.