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STAFF REPORT PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting Date: October 1, 2013

Case Planner: Steve Timms

Case #: SAP-004-13: Commerce City Station Area Master Plan (STAMP)

Location: Area around East 72nd Avenue and Colorado Boulevard

Applicant: City of Commerce City

Staff Recommendation: Approval of STAMP

I. Introduction/Summary

For the past year, the community, along with city staff and the selected consultant, have been working on this Commerce City Station Area Master Plan. This Plan establishes a framework for future infrastructure improvements and updated land uses as the Commerce City neighborhood awaits the arrival of the North Metro FasTracks Commerce City station. After an extensive request for proposal process, MIG, a consulting firm with extensive specialization in station –area and transit-oriented development, was chosen to assist the city in the planning process.

The planning process kicked-off with a variety of stakeholder and focus groups that had direct interest and knowledge of this area and the community. In addition, a Technical Working Group (TWG) was formed and composed of outside agencies with technical and specialized knowledge of the area. Finally, an internal Staff Working Group (SWG) was assembled and comprised of city staff from key departments. These groups met periodically throughout the planning process. In addition, there was extensive public outreach with community and neighborhood meetings, “road show” presentations, website updates, and information through various city publications and community wide neighborhood outreaches. Finally, several individual and joint City Council and Planning Commission study sessions were held to obtain feedback as the planning process progressed.

All of these venues provided valuable feedback as the team worked through identifying key community issues and developing a proactive community vision and strategic goals for the Plan. The vision and planning framework provided the basis for the Plan elements including land use, transportation, connectivity, image, open space, urban design, economic development, and sustainability. This input also provided the basis for development of the land use plan. The TWG and public played a key role in identifying implementation actions and prioritizing those actions.

A draft of the STAMP was prepared this fall. It is a proactive, forward looking document that focuses on the critical need for the city to have a clear infrastructure and improvement strategy and sustainable mix of land uses for the long-term future.

In accordance with the City Charter, the Planning Commission must make a recommendation to City Council regarding adoption of the Plan. The Plan is scheduled for consideration at the October 21, 2013 City Council public hearing.

II. History of Comprehensive Plans in Commerce City

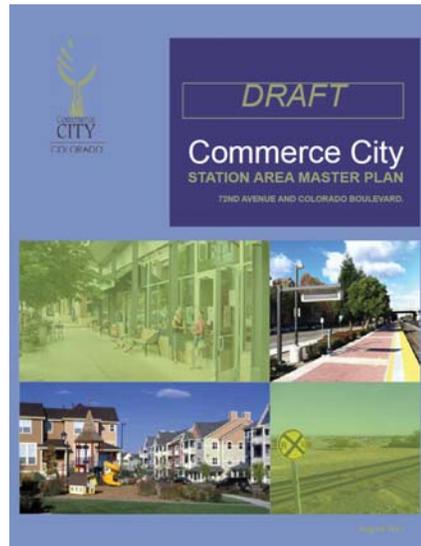
Commerce City has a long history of planning for the future. This Plan builds on the city's previous comprehensive and sub-area plans, as noted below. It is the intent of this plan to build and expand upon the work done in the C3 Vision Comprehensive Plan for the city, adopted in 2010.

Comprehensive Plan tradition and prior Commerce City plans, including:

- The 1975-2000 Plan (adopted in 1977) was the city's first Comprehensive Plan.
- The 1985-2010 Plan (adopted in 1985) built upon the 1977 Plan. The city updated that plan as recently as 2007 to address areas in the north that were not contemplated in the 1985 Plan.
- The C3 Vision Comprehensive Plan (adopted in 2010)
- The C3 Vision Transportation Plan (adopted in 2010)
- Economic Development Strategic Plan (adopted in 2010)
- Newer sub-area plans include:
 - The New Lands Comprehensive Plan (1992),
 - Irondale Comprehensive Plan and Land Use (1998),
 - Prairie Gateway Land Use Plan (2006), and
 - The Master Plan for the Revitalization of the Derby Sub-Area (2006).
 - The Walk Bike Fit Plan (adopted in 2012)

III. Why is a Plan Needed?

The arrival of Commerce City's commuter rail station brings well-deserved and critically-needed focus to the neighborhoods of Adams City and Adams Heights. For many years, residents in these areas coped with substandard conditions such as a lack of safe connectivity, damaged or incomplete sidewalks, few crosswalks, fast-moving traffic, lack of bike lanes, few neighborhood parks, and limited neighborhood-serving uses. The Commerce City Station Area Master Plan (STAMP) is the culmination of efforts by a wide range of community stakeholders to identify improvements to existing neighborhoods, leverage the area's assets and opportunities, and envision a preferred future for the area.



IV. What is a Sub-Area Plan?

Simply put, a Sub-Area Plan is:

- A guide for the management of change in a particular area,
- A reflection of community values and aspirations for select neighborhoods,
- The foundation for policies, strategies, and actions within the area,
- The neighborhood's to-do list, and
- A catalyst for community consensus.

More specifically, the purpose of the STAMP plan is to set forth the vision and goals of the study area to help guide development and investment decisions. It sets the stage for development regulations, and ongoing decision-making and guides the city in funding programs and capital investments.

It is a plan for the future (to the year 2040 +), but also addresses immediate needs. It is designed to guide the growth and development of this area of the city and recommend programs and directions for services and infrastructure. It establishes a policy framework for the city to help evaluate choices the city faces, guide decisions on development proposals, and consider amendments to the plan. In accordance with state statutes, the plan is an advisory document that sets the policy foundation for the city's decision-making process and regulatory framework. It is not zoning and does not dictate mandatory regulations.

V. How This Plan Helps Commerce City

Imagine the STAMP as the roadmap for this area of Commerce City. It directs the city towards its vision and spells out the steps and actions it needs to take to reach its desired destination.

The Plan will help the city determine where it should make strategic investments such as road and infrastructure improvements, connectivity enhancements, and the locations of new public facilities like parks. It will guide future development and redevelopment efforts so they are of quality design and contribute to improving the city's image. The Plan also will point the city in the right direction so that it can actively recruit new businesses and economic development

opportunities. It will help the community become more sustainable, balancing commerce and the economy with the local context and environment, and with the community needs and social well-being. Finally, it will educate future residents and businesses by communicating where the city is “headed,” enabling it to play a larger role in regional issues.

VI. Planning Commission’s Role with the Comprehensive Plan

According to Colorado State Law, authority for municipal Comprehensive Plans is given to Planning Commissions. The City Charter, in accordance with Section 10.3, supports this, by stating that the Planning Commission shall “make, amend, and add to the Master Plan for the physical development of the city.” This master plan is identified in Section 10.7, which describes it as, “The Master Plan for the physical development of the city, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive and explanatory matter, shall show the Planning Commission’s recommendations for the development of the city and may include, among other things:

- The general location, character, and extent of streets, bridges, parks, waterways, and other public ways, grounds and space.
- The general location of public buildings and other public property.
- The general location and extent of public utilities, whether publicly or privately owned.
- The removal, relocation, widening, extension, narrowing, vacating, abandonment, acquisition or change of use, of existing or future public ways.
- The general extent and location of public housing projects and slum clearing projects.”

Simply stated, the Planning Commission is charged with overseeing the plan process and framework. They will make a recommendation regarding the adoption of this document, and City Council will have final approval authority.

VII. Process

The STAMP process was divided into eight different phases or tasks. They are as follows:

1. Initiation
2. Project Management
3. Data Collection and Analysis
4. Visioning- Transportation
5. Visioning- Infrastructure
6. Land Use Plan
7. Implementation
8. Final Plan

VIII. Outreach

The STAMP has had one of the most extensive outreach of any plan ever produced within the city. The outreach approach was one where a wide variety of “mediums” and events would be utilized to present the plan and gather the most feedback. Altogether, hundreds of people voiced input and gave ideas that helped to shape this plan. Specific information about the outreach process can be found in the appendix section of the plan.

IX. Planning Framework

The planning framework principles and ideas for the plan are a direct result of several key features, including the Planning Commission and City Council study sessions, direct community involvement, and key stakeholder responses. These principles and ideas have grown out of numerous public discussions and exercises where the community has described the ideal future for the station area.

These include the following:

1. Enhance Community Livability and Safety
2. Create Destinations
3. Connect the Neighborhood
4. Emphasize Safe Pedestrian Access
5. Maximize Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Potential
6. Stimulate Economic Development

X. Organization of the Station Area Master Plan

The Plan opens with a general history, background, and context/existing conditions of the area and then transitions into the vision, followed by the specific planning framework and urban design concepts, before concluding with specific recommendations for Plan Implementation. It is organized as follows:

- Chapter I: Introduction: Explains the Plan’s background and purpose, identifies related planning efforts and documents, provides an overview of the overall project process, and outlines the organization of the Plan document;
- Chapter II: Existing Conditions: Describes the area’s local and regional context, and identifies the key assets, challenges, and opportunities related to realizing the area’s potential;
- Chapter III: Vision: Conveys a community- based preferred future for the station area;
- Chapter IV: Planning Framework: Outlines six overarching planning strategies that will guide the area’s urban design and development;
- Chapter V: Urban Design Concept: Describes the overall urban design framework for the project area that will guide the character of the private and public realms; and

- Chapter VI: Implementation: Presents phased implementation strategies to help advance key opportunities outlined in this Plan.

XI. Plan Summary Description

The urban design concept for the future station area emphasizes enhanced circulation patterns and open space networks, new residential and mixed-use land uses, and improvements to the public realm. Illustrated on the “Station Area Master Plan Buildout” pages of the plan, the maps depict priority improvements that are proposed for implementation over near-term (0 – 10 year), mid-term (10 – 20), and long-term (20+) timeframes.

Some of the summary concepts for different subjects are listed below:

Station Area/Platform:

1. Electric commuter rail serving this station with Town Center Contemporary typology
2. Two accesses to station, with primary access from E. 70th Avenue
3. Fernald Trailhead parking and trail access relocated
4. Initial parking lot size to accommodate 600 cars

Economic Development:

1. Mixed-use commercial corridor of E. 72nd Avenue
2. Office activity in close proximity to station/interchange access
3. Visibility from Interstate 76 is attractive for new development
4. Surrounding area is still growing in population
5. Opportunities for employment/industrial uses
6. Over 125 acres of potential “redevelopment land”

Residential Activity:

1. Highest density residential west of station site
2. Housing density will decrease as one moves away from station area
3. Existing single-family neighborhoods are considered stable
4. Encouragement to reinvest in existing housing stock
5. Opportunities for additional senior housing

Schools, Parks, and Open Space:

1. Relocation of Alsup and Adams City Middle School
2. Increased connections to trails, parks, and open space on both sides of neighborhood
3. Sidewalks and safe routes to schools
4. New residential would contain new parks and amenities

Transportation, Access, and Connectivity:

1. Improve E. 72nd Avenue and Colorado Boulevard initially
2. Improve vehicular access, parking, and public transit connections
3. Enhance the quality of walking and biking
4. Increase safety lighting and way-finding

5. Full interchange movement at I-76

Infrastructure:

1. Improvements for water mains and lift station for existing and future development
2. Improvements for storm water detention for existing and future development
3. Coordinate regionally

Urban Design/Destination/Image:

1. Creating a unique/special place within Commerce City
2. Include public art and key way-finding signage
3. Long term relocation of gravel/sand operations

Gentrification/Displacement:

1. Market will ultimately dictate property values
2. Station will allow new opportunities for residents
3. Support for workforce development and small neighborhood businesses
4. Possible programs to help renters become home owners
5. Opportunities to increase educational and medical opportunities
6. No residential condemnations or annexation will occur with this passage of the plan

Financing Strategies:

1. CIPP
2. Grants/ DRCOG
3. Tax Increment Financing
4. Assessment Districts
5. Non-contiguous Metropolitan Districts

XII. Implementation of the Station Master Plan

How will the city take action?

The STAMP is a vision plan and a policy document that will guide decision-making within this area of the city. While it contains many long-term and seemingly far-reaching goals, and ideals, it also needs to be achievable. The final chapter explains how Commerce City will begin to implement the Plan, once adopted, through:

- Specific Actions, identified in a Priority Action Plan,
- Assignment of roles, responsibilities, and schedules for key milestones, and
- Plan Amendments and Updates, described as updates and a process for more frequent changes.

Commerce City will implement this Plan using several different approaches including:

- Policy Decisions (day-to-day decision, usually by the Planning Commission or City Council),

- Land Development Code (LDC) Amendments (Adjustments to the LDC to make it easier to accomplish plan goals),
- Partnerships and Intergovernmental Agreements (with neighboring entities, such as Adams County or CDOT),
- Programs (such as housing or economic development), and
- Infrastructure Assessment/ Improvements (roads or parks).

Timing of Actions:

The Action Steps Table includes the priority strategies identified through this process. The city will begin them within 0-5 years, 0-10 years, 0- 20 years, or 10-20 years. In addition, certain actions will also be ongoing after the city initiates them.

XIII. Recommendation

In conclusion, staff is recommending that the Planning Commission forward the adoption of the Station Area Master Plan to City Council with a favorable recommendation.

XIV. Motion

“I move that the Planning Commission recommend that City Council adopt the Station Area Master Plan (STAMP) C3Vision, dated October 2013, a copy of which is on file with the city.”