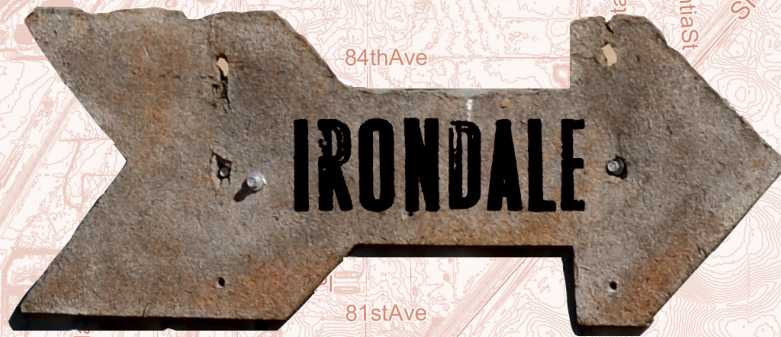


# IRONDALE NEIGHBORHOOD & INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This page intentionally left blank.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About the Irondale Plan

The Irondale Neighborhood and Infrastructure Plan was undertaken in late 2017 with the goal of outlining the existing conditions and upgrades to the roadway, drainage, and utility networks.

The intent of the project is to create a vision for Irondale’s future. To that end, the plan process sought answers to key questions on what should remain and where changes and improvements could be made in the neighborhood. Project steps included research and discussion of the neighborhood today and plans for the growth and development into the future. Four major topics include: roads, drainage, utilities and land use.

This plan prioritizes infrastructure needs to help guide growth and change in the neighborhood in the years to come. Planning for the needs of Irondale in advance will help make sure the right improvements happen in the right order to support the shared vision.

Key Parts of the Irondale Plan:

## The Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is set up as a high-level preview of the full document. Details on each of the sections and key recommendations can be found in this section.

Public Meetings: At a Glance		
3 Open Houses in the Neighborhood	83 formal issues identified at the first public meeting	3 City Council Worksessions



The Irondale Neighborhood + Infrastructure Plan is made up of three major sections (below), with the Snapshot reports making up the Discover section in the written plan.

- DISCOVER**  
*A look at existing conditions and challenges.*
- EXPLORE + ASSESS**  
*Working with the community and stakeholders, review and weigh the options to determine the best fit for Irondale.*
- IMPLEMENTATION**  
*Putting together the steps to bring the vision forward through district action items.*

Understanding the desires of and drives of residents, land owners, and business owners in the neighborhood is an essential step in weighing the alternatives for the future. Public input occurred with each stage of the project.

*Full meeting details and results are included in Appendix A of the Plan.*

## Plan Context

As the 1990's progressed and Commerce City began to grow more rapidly toward Denver International Airport (DIA) and E-470, the older neighborhoods of Commerce City were no longer the only focus for the City. Today the City is looking at historic neighborhoods like Irondale to address long-standing concerns.

## The Irondale Neighborhood History

The neighborhood currently includes a mixture of residential properties, businesses, industrial centers and even agriculture. Change is happening in Irondale as new development takes place, increasing the importance to plan for the future of the area in a thoughtful and collaborative way.

The Irondale Neighborhood is an older part of the larger Commerce City community. The initial neighborhood was developed around the Kibler Stove Works plant. According to the 2015 Historic Preservation Plan, the neighborhood was originally "planned as a factory town."

Over time residences were built in the neighborhood as additional industrial uses cropped up. The mixture of uses and timing of development has created a unique environment. The neighborhood today includes nearly every zone district with Commerce City, and additional zones within the Adams County pockets. The mixture includes agricultural uses with animals, residential units, commercial parcels like the restaurant and grocery store, public facilities like the fire station, and various industrial developments. Infrastructure is a major challenge as accommodating these diverse uses.

Industrial development within the neighborhood is not new; however, increasing pressure on industrial areas within the Denver area have found this area to be a prime location for development. A new rail spur is being built at the time of this report connecting a new large facility for Intsel Steel in the north central part of the neighborhood. Given the trends in the area, it's anticipated this speculation and industrial development will continue to occur.



**Discover**—A look at existing conditions and challenges.

This section includes details of current roadway, infrastructure, drainage and land use conditions. In addition, the demographics and history of the Irondale neighborhood are used to provide the background for the second chapter looking into alternatives and considerations for the future. Together with public input and recommendations from City staff, this section outlines existing conditions, challenges, and concerns.

**Roads Snapshot**

The transportation network inside Irondale is somewhat inefficient. Many streets terminate at dead ends rather than being connected to the network in a grid pattern. Existing railroad corridors on both the east and west sides of Irondale limit the east-west connectivity to the surrounding Commerce City transportation network. Left-turns are prohibited from 80th Ave. to Rosemary Street, as well as from Rosemary Street to 80th Ave. Rosemary Street is the only north-south street that goes all the way through Irondale from 80th Ave. to 88th Ave. As such, Rosemary Street is heavily used by commuters as a route to the interchange of Interstate 76 at 88th Avenue.

**The Snapshot Reports**

The snapshot report is designed to provide an overview of the current conditions within the neighborhood. The snapshot is not exhaustive, but rather a foundation to engage in conversation about the existing and future plans to be developed.

*Below: Demographics Table*

**Demographic Snapshot**

As shown in the table to the right, Irondale has a unique set of characteristics when compared to Commerce City as a whole. The neighborhood has experienced a slight decline in population in the past 15 or so years, while the City has doubled. Income is lower and poverty rate higher in the neighborhood. However, the rate of unemployment is low; this could be indicative of underemployment or represent unreported incomes. The Hispanic Latino population makes up the majority of neighborhood residents, nearly double the population percentage of the City. Another item to note is that nearly half of all homeowners in the neighborhood own the property outright.

	Irondale	Commerce City
<b>Population (2015)</b>	816	50,346
<b>Population (2000)</b>	821	20,991
<b>Median Household Income</b>	\$23,472	\$66,053
<b>Poverty Rate</b>	48.5%	15.6%
<b>Unemployment</b>	5.83%	6.82%
<b>Median Year Home Built</b>	1963	2001
<b>Median Gross Rent</b>	\$635	\$973
<b>Homes with Debt (mortgage, equity loan, etc.)</b>	54.5%	85%
<b>Percent Hispanic / Latino</b>	84.3%	45.6%

*Source: US Census & US Census American Community Survey, 2016*

**Land Use Snapshot**

Irondale zoning is primarily a mixture of industrial and residential districts. All but two Commerce City zone districts are represented in Irondale. While a mixture of land uses within an area can be a positive attribute in creating live-work neighborhoods, the blend seen in Irondale is causing conflict with the major disparities of intensity.

Current land uses are predominantly residential and industrial. The large amount of agricultural land is largely residential uses or undeveloped property rather than actual farm uses. It should be noted that a number of the residential properties have associated uses of either agricultural, with a number of farm animals, or industrial, with outdoor storage.

Providing an additional layer of confusion are the different jurisdictions within the neighborhood. A majority of the properties are within Commerce City; however, a number of Adams County enclaves exist. The mixture of the two jurisdictions causes confusion regarding different standards and enforcement, responses to incidents, and providing continuity of service.

**Drainage Snapshot**

The Irondale neighborhood is located near the downstream end of the Irondale Gulch Watershed. This watershed encompasses 23.4 square miles (14,979 acres) in total, compared to 556 acres for the Irondale neighborhood. The watershed begins upstream in the City of Aurora, near I-70, where it drains northwesterly through the City of Denver, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge (RMANWR), and Commerce City before ultimately discharging into the South Platte River near 88th Avenue. Flows cross northwesterly into Irondale by crossing over State Highway 2 and ponding behind the BNSF Railroad embankment. If a storm event is large enough, these flows could overtop the railroad tracks and flood into the Irondale neighborhood.

Between Irondale and the South Platte River, the overall flow pattern is northwest towards 88th Avenue and the Union Pacific Railroad crossing, then directly west towards the river. In general, there are no defined flow paths here; flows from upstream and runoff generated in the Irondale area move toward the river as shallow flooding and sheet flow. In the current condition, these flows are prevented from reaching the South Platte by the UPRR embankment, the O'Brian Canal, and Interstate 76.

The 2011 Irondale Gulch Outfall Systems Plan by Moser & Associates Engineering (Irondale OSP) explained that “the main flood hazard in the study area is the absence of conveyance in Commerce City west of State Highway 2.” There are no culverts under major roadways or railroads with significant embankments and there are no storm water detention or retention facilities within Commerce City. Additionally, the upper watershed and Irondale neighborhood area do not have a formal or informal outfall to the South Platte River.

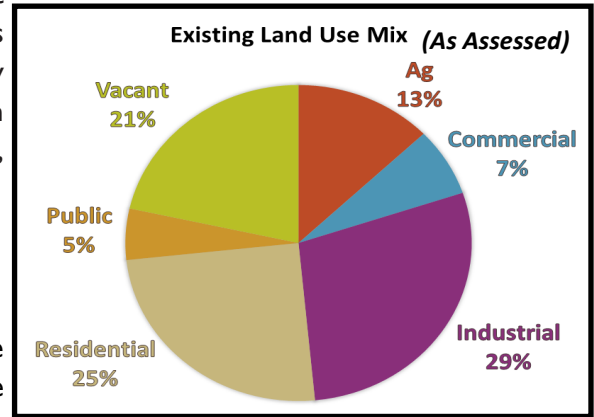
**Utilities Snapshot**

The Irondale neighborhood receives water and sanitary sewer service from South Adams County Water and Sanitation District (District). Most of the water lines in Irondale meet current standards regarding size and material type. However, the District is currently updating their water and sewer master plan to identify priority improvements to enhance the water system.

Xcel Energy provides natural gas and electric service to Irondale. Street lighting is limited in the neighborhood, with facilities on sections of the following streets: 88th Ave, 87th Ave, 86th Ave, 84th Ave, 80th Ave, Pontiac St, Quebec St, Rosemary Street, Ulster St, Willow St, Xenia St, and Yosemite St.

When roadway improvement projects and heavy rail spur construction is identified, all underground utilities will need evaluation to determine if they need to be rehabilitated, replaced, relocated or in the case of railroad tracks, sleeved where they may cross underneath the tracks.

*Below: Current Irondale Land Use Assessment*



**Explore & Assess** — Working with the community and stakeholders, review and weigh the options.

Looking into the future of the neighborhood, this chapter uses input from the Irondale community, guidance from city staff and officials, and review of economic pressure and trends affecting the area.

**Development of Alternatives**

Future alternatives—Scenarios— are used to weigh and balance the effects of changes to the neighborhood. While some actions may take places in both future cases, many would be dependent on each other. Grouping and assessing these alternatives separately helps determine the best path forward for the neighborhood.

The future land use of the neighborhood effects the development of roadways, utilities, and even drainage. For that reason, the land use scenarios were integral in developing the network alternatives. The land use component was created though public input, existing patterns, and guidance from staff and elected officials.

During the first public meeting, attendees were asked to identify conflicts and places where uses work well together, as well as what they'd like to see for the future of the neighborhood. Many responses indicated industrial uses being a desirable path for the neighborhood, with some areas remaining residential. The continued pressure for industrial development was taken into account on both scenarios. Additionally, the rail spur from the east into the neighborhood will likely encourage more uses like commercial and industrial that are less affected by the impacts of a railroad.






**Option 1: Current Vision** aligns more closely with the current future land use map for the area. **Option 2: Industrial Transition** is an exploration of the change of nearly all to all residential uses disappearing over time. Developing two realistic but disparate options for the neighborhood can be helpful in weighing the alternatives.

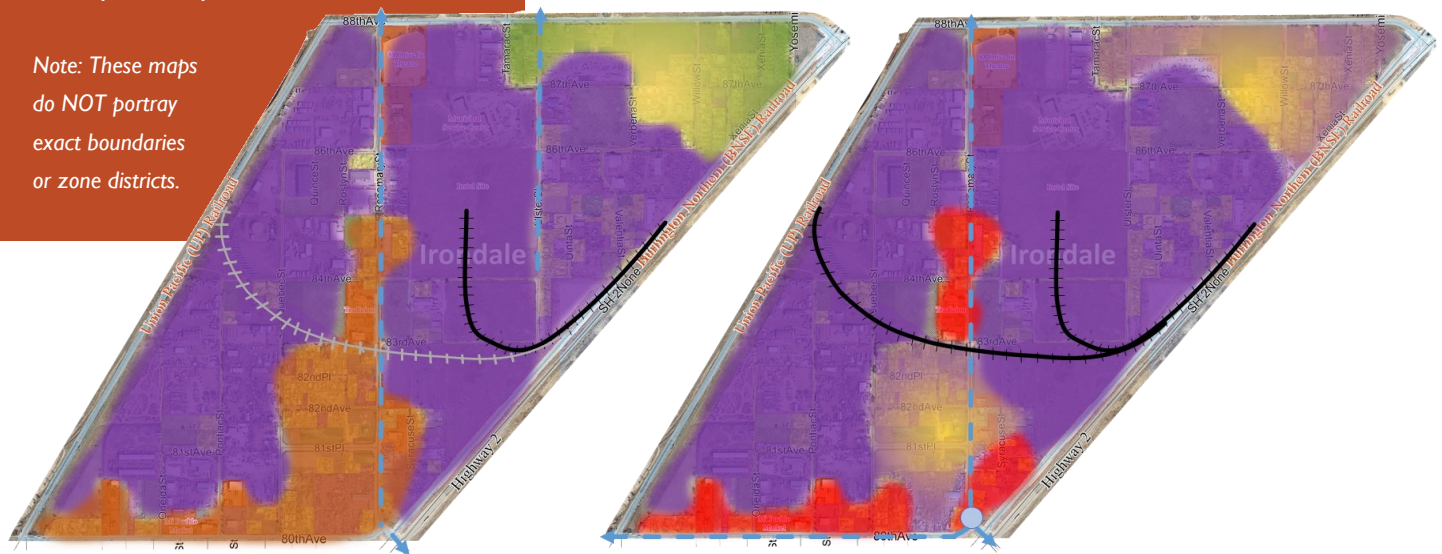
**The Scenario Maps Help to:**

- Explore future land use possibilities
- Provide an idea of direction
- Start discussion
- Explore impacts

*Note: These maps do NOT portray exact boundaries or zone districts.*

**Legend**

	Residential—Ag		Light Industrial—Transitional
	Multi-Use Focus		General Industrial
	Multi-Use Commercial Focus		



Option 1: Current Vision

Option 2: Industrial Transition

**Road Network Implications**

The most critical need for the Irondale neighborhood is to figure out how to make the streets within Irondale function as a network, creating internal circulation for the different roadway users.

Based on anticipated future land uses and possibilities for additional rail spurs in the neighborhood, two networks were developed. Roadway elements were explored in conjunction with each future scenario option. Emphasis was given to improving circulation within Irondale by opening up streets to eliminate dead-ends. Circulation benefits business development by allowing more than one way to access the business. Circulation is also necessary to ensure that emergency response vehicles are able to easily access all areas of the neighborhood. Scenario development considered the railroad spur that will create a dead-end at the south end of Ulster Street and the east end of 83rd Avenue, as well as the potential for a railroad cross-connect track which will bisect the Irondale neighborhood creating several at-grade roadway/railroad crossings.

**Drainage Network Implications**

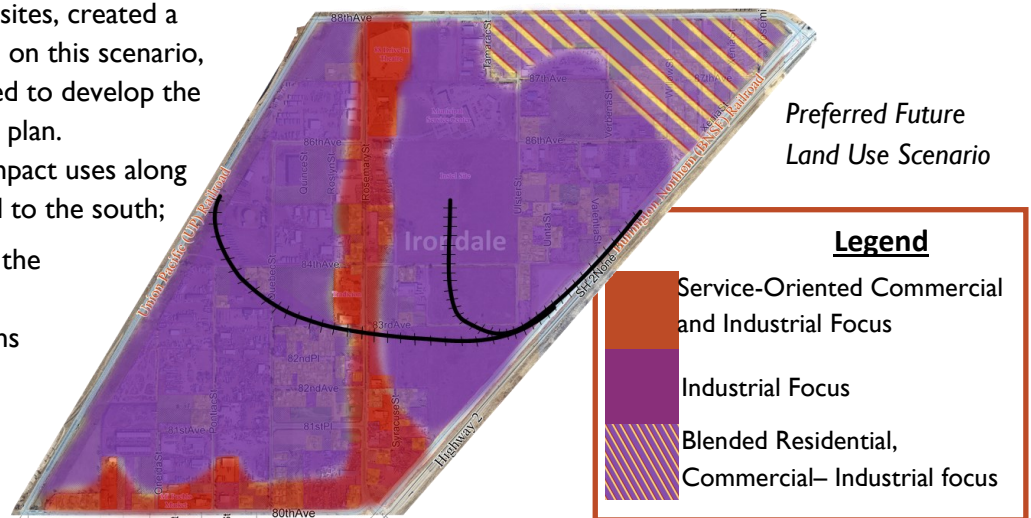
Drainage plans were developed for both the current vision and industrial transition scenarios. The only master drainage plan for Irondale comes from Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, which prepared an Outfall Systems Plan Conceptual Design Report for Irondale Gulch in September 2011. This master drainage plan recommends constructing five regional detention ponds within the Irondale neighborhood. The locations for these regional detention ponds were selected by Urban Drainage on parcels of land that were undeveloped at the time of the September 2011 plan. As the plan was just that – a planning document— the pond locations are conceptual and not currently owned by the City for development as regional detention ponds. The exact locations would be determined in coordination with property owners at the time of acquisition and development. Other possible locations for regional detention ponds are the parcels of land owned by Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR). While the UPRR may be constructing a cross-connect railroad track through these parcels, there is a potential to collaborate with the UPRR to utilize a portion of these parcels as regional detention provided that it does not interfere with the tracks themselves.

**Preferred Future Land Use Scenario**

In this scenario, the general industrial remains largely the same as the two exploratory scenarios. The Commercial corridor extends along 80th Avenue and along Rosemary. These corridors were identified as desirable for less intensive uses. The northeast corner of the neighborhood is a blended area. A number residents cited a strong desire to remain in place, while the changing zone districts of this area from residential and ag properties to industrial uses, sometimes on existing residential sites, created a need for a mixed approach. Based on this scenario, additional comments were solicited to develop the “hard lines” of the future land use plan.

Considerations included: lower-impact uses along 80th, bordering the neighborhood to the south;

buffering higher impact uses from the core northeast residential pocket; aligning existing ownership patterns and industrial development with continued pressures for industrial development.





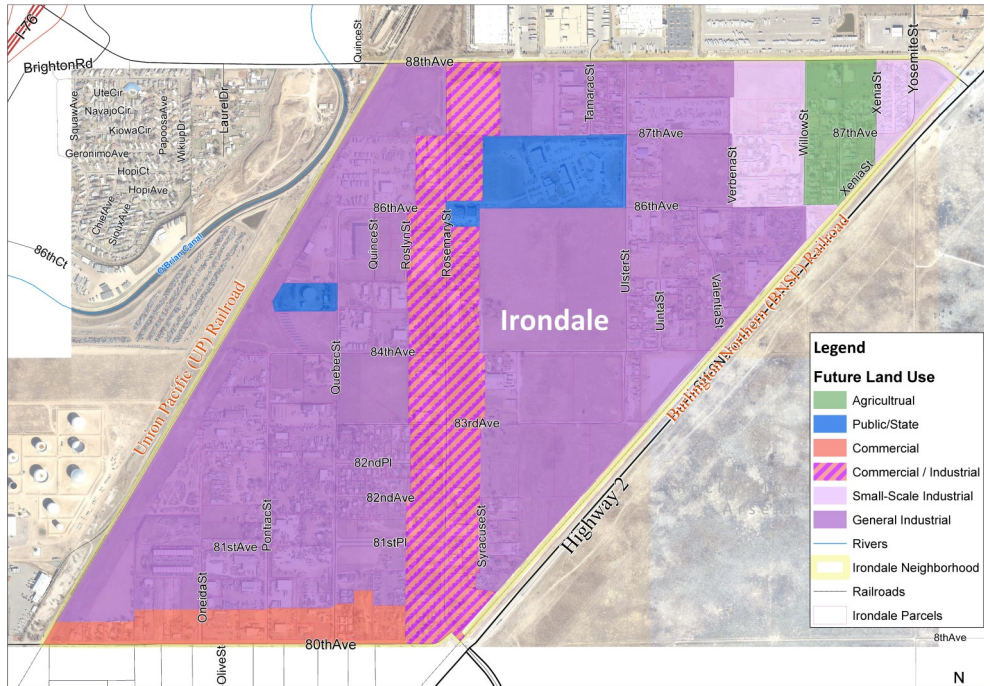
**Implementation** — Putting together the steps to bring the vision forward through distinct action items.

Bridging the gap between the existing neighborhood, future development, and interests of the Irondale community, this section identifies steps to incremental changes, including policies and capital improvements.

**Future Land Use Plan**

The mix of existing land uses was a major consideration for the development of this part of the plan. As industrial uses continue to expand and new uses are established in the neighborhood, concerns regarding impacts and conflict between less intense uses is likely to increase. In an effort to minimize conflicts between low intensity uses (like residential) and higher intensity uses (like industrial) this plan supports consolidating future uses. Specifically, areas along the possible route for the Union Pacific Railroad Spur are anticipated to become more industrial in nature. Additionally, areas abutting major transportation corridors are more compatible with industrial and commercial uses. The Future Land Use Map indicates support to reduce residential pockets adjacent to industrial uses.

A key question asked by many landowners is, “Can I continue my current use, even though the Future Land Use Map indicates a different use?” The short answer is ‘yes’ provided your current use is legal. Unless you pursue a change to your current use via a zone change or expansion of the current use, you may continue business as usual.



Above: Future Land Use Plan Map

**Moving from Future Land Use to Zoning**



Step 1: A landowner has an idea to change the use of his/her property.

Step 2: City Staff and the Landowner consult the Future Land Use Plan for guidance.

Step 3: A Zone Change request may be necessary for City Council to consider the new use.

**Capital Improvements**

One major goal of the Irondale Neighborhood and Infrastructure Plan is to identify infrastructure investments that can be coordinated to ensure expenditures have the greatest cost-benefit to area stakeholders and the City. The map depicting improvements was developed through extensive public engagement discussions as well as through analysis and feedback from technical experts. On-site assessment also aided in confirming conditions of existing infrastructure, where possible.

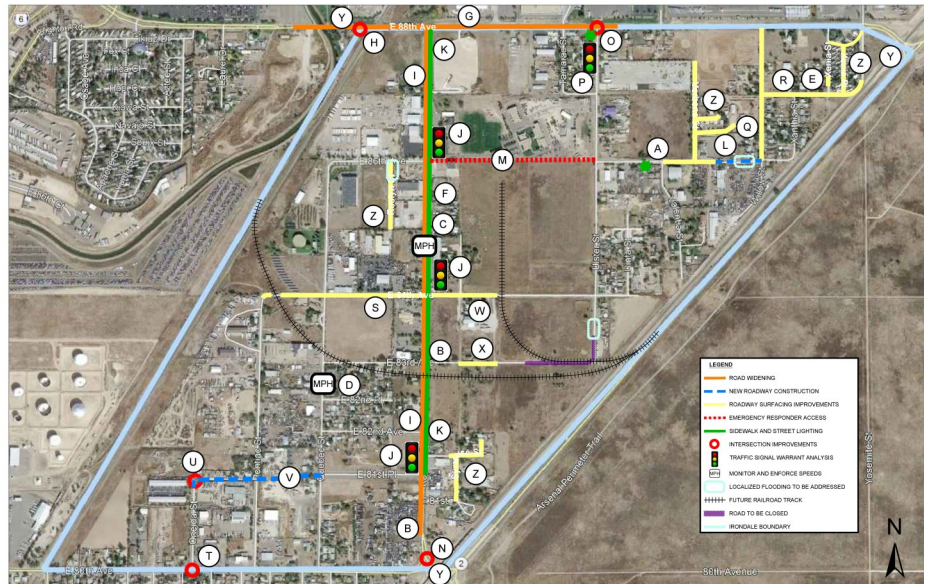
The recommended projects utilized the Future Land Use Map as the baseline for future uses, which influences the

required infrastructure investments. The Capital Improvements also included consideration that the Union Pacific Rail Road (UPRR) cross connect spur would be constructed, and therefore influence traffic and infrastructure patterns.

The projects identified on the Capital Improvement Plan will take years to complete. Securing funding, exploring relationships with other partners, and permitting could take years for the larger projects. Some may never be constructed. However, this plan provides a consolidated list that the City and stakeholders can consult during the annual

budget process to help in prioritizing elements that present the greatest need and benefit to the Irondale neighborhood. **For a full list of recommendations see the Plan document.**

Below: Capital Improvement Recommendations Map



## Drainage Recommendations

The stormwater drainage system is one of the more complex infrastructure issues facing the future of Irondale. In considering the regional watershed, and both upstream and downstream impacts, this system faces extensive external influences - some even extending beyond the boundaries of Commerce City.

This plan recommends that a Regional Detention approach be considered moving forward, but that interim improvements may utilize a system of Individual On-Site detention until such time as funding is identified. The Regional approach would consolidate detention in larger, more centrally located ponds throughout the neighborhood. This regional approach is complicated by the high upfront cost and minimal opportunities to phase the system into place. It does provide a superior solution by reducing the overall amount of land in the neighborhood dedicated to detention, thus increasing total economic viability.

Until such time as funding can be secured, Individual On-Site detention may be used to address drainage issues for development projects. Due to this interim approach, properties that may have the potential to site a regional pond as depicted in the Denver Urban Drainage Map will not be precluded from developing the site based on preservation of the regional drainage potential. It is important to note that larger individual basins may be required due to the efficiency of this incremental approach.

## Next Steps to Explore

Throughout the Irondale process, many excellent ideas were proposed to help streamline implementation of the vision. Elements like policies, development codes and regulations are necessary to ensure even standards throughout the City. Some of the recommendations in the full document look at the unique circumstances in Irondale that could be explored further to determine if adjustments might help in moving the program forward.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan was developed in 2017 and 2018 with guidance from the following groups:

## **City of Commerce City Council**

Mayor Sean Ford

Mayor Pro Tem Rick Teter – Ward II

Councilman Oscar Madera – Ward I

Councilwoman Nicole Frank – Ward III

Councilman Paolo Diaz – Ward IV

Councilman Steve Douglas – Council At-Large

Councilwoman Crystal Elliott – Council At-Large

Councilman José Guardiola – Council At-Large

Councilman Benjamin Huseman – Council At-Large

## **Past Members**

Mayor Pro Tem René Bullock – Council At-Large

Councilman Andrew Amador – Ward I

Councilwoman Jadie Carson – Ward III

Councilman Jason McEldowney – Council At-Large

## **City of Commerce City Planning Commission**

Jonathan Popiel, Chairman

Andrew Amador, Vice-Chair

Karen Anderson

Dennis Cammack

L. Warren Jones

Aaron Herrera, Alternate

Harvest Thomas, Alternate

David Yost, Alternate

## **Past Members**

Joseph Dreiling



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **Commerce City Staff Working Group**

Jenny Axmacher, AICP, Senior Planner

Michelle Claymore, Economic Development Director

Chris Cramer, AICP, Community Development Director

Maria D'Andrea, PE, Public Works Director

Michelle Halstead, Director of External Affairs/Interim Public Works Director

Travis Huntington, Communications Specialist

Laura Moody, Economic Development Coordinator

Lorena Ruiz, Administrative Specialist

Steve Timms, AICP, Planning Manager

Roger Tinklenberg, Deputy City Manager

## **Technical Advisory Committee**

Paula Baker, Commerce City Neighborhood Services Division

Albert Francisco, Adams 14 School District

Joelle Greenland, Adams County

Annemarie Heinrich, Tri-County Health Department

Nick Kaczor, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

David Lucas, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Jeff Nelson, South Adams County Water and Sanitation District

Teresa Patterson, Urban Drainage and Flood Control District

Randall Weigum, South Adams County Fire District

Jennifer Woods, Adams County



## **Ayres Associates Project Team**

Matt Ashby, AICP CUD

Dale Mathison, PE

Darci Hendon, PE

Barbara Kloth, AICP

Matt Simpson, PE CFM

Logan Ward, AICP