Fort Collins

Small-Scale Subarea Plan Audit

Subarea and Corridor Plan Alignment to Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code Update

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Purpose of this Audit

At the April 22nd Work Session focused on the Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code Update, Councilmembers asked a variety of questions about the role of subarea plans and their relationship to the proposed updates. Councilmembers particularly asked staff if the proposed changes to the Land Use Code (LUC) could create any conflicts or inconsistencies between the City's subarea plans and the Land Use Code. As a follow-up to that conversation, staff have prepared a small-scale audit of the City's subarea plans.

The process for reviewing these subarea plans included documenting whether policies and implementation actions contained within the subarea plans were in alignment or misalignment with the Guiding Principles and the proposed updates to the Land Use Code.

Distinction between the purpose of the Land Use Code and Subarea/Corridor Plans:

The LUC and subarea plans serve distinct but complementary roles in shaping community development.

The Land Use Code is a legally binding set of rules and standards adopted by the City that regulates how land can be used and developed. It includes zoning regulations, allowable land uses, building heights, setbacks, parking requirements, and other enforceable development standards. The LUC applies citywide and provides the regulatory framework that all new development must follow.

In contrast, a subarea plan is a policy and planning document that outlines a long-term vision and guiding principles for a specific geographic area within the city. Subarea plans reflect extensive community input and provide strategic direction on land use, urban design, mobility, public spaces, and infrastructure. While not regulatory, subarea plans inform and influence how the Land Use Code is applied or amended within the specific area. They help prioritize investment, guide redevelopment, and ensure that changes in the built environment align with community goals and unique neighborhood character. Subarea plans frequently result in changes to the LUC to codify important elements of subarea plans. Examples of this include design standards from the Downtown Plan, the origin of the High-Density Mixed-Use Neighborhood (HMN) zone district, and the Transit-Oriented Development Overlay from the Midtown Plan, amongst others.

In summary, the Land Use Code regulates what is allowed and required, while a subarea plan provides more detail about what is desired and envisioned for a particular part of the city. Together, they guide consistent and intentional growth.

Audit Process

For the purposes of this small-scale audit, the majority of the City's subarea plans and corridor plans were reviewed. Plans were selected for review based on whether they contained significant amounts of commercial zone districts, employment zone districts, or large portions of the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlay. Commercial, employment, and the TOD overlay zone are the focus of the Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code update.

The following subarea plans were reviewed as part of this audit:

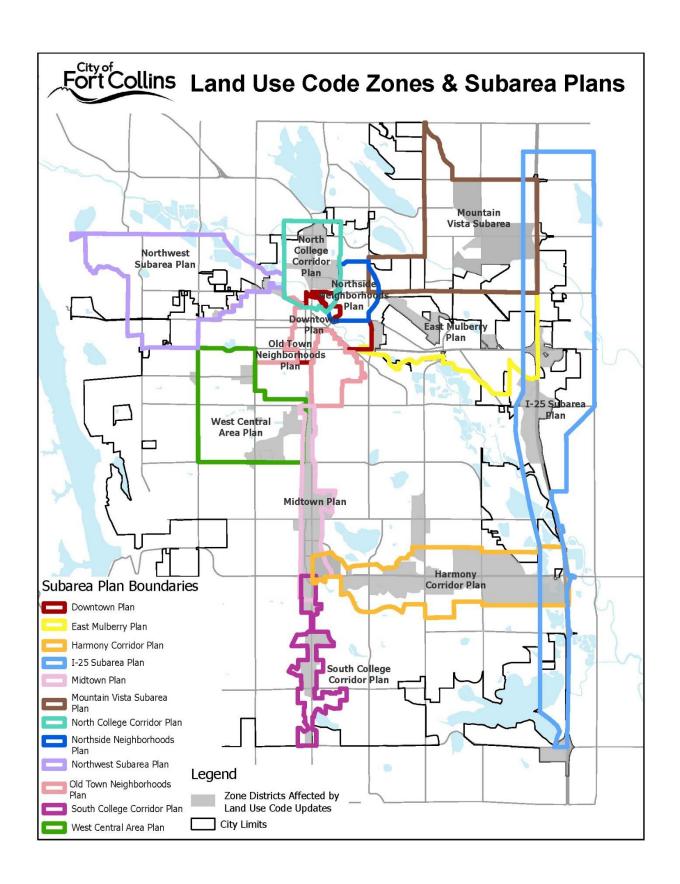
- East Mulberry Plan 2023
- Downtown Plan 2017
- West Central Area Plan 2015
- Mountain Vista Subarea Plan 2009
- Northside Neighborhoods Plan 2005

The City also maintains a set of corridor plans, which are similar to subarea plans but focus on outlining development strategies for a linear space, like certain segments of a roadway.

The following corridor plans were reviewed:

- Midtown Plan 2013
- South College Corridor Plan 2009
- North College Corridor Plan 2007
- Harmony Corridor Plan 2006
- I-25 Subarea Plan 2003

The map on the following page depicts the plan area boundaries of all of the City's current subarea and corridor plans. Areas shown as grey are an amalgamation of various commercial and employment zone districts. Collectively, these zone districts would be subject to update in the Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code update.



Summary of Subarea and Corridor Plan Alignment with Land Use Code Guiding Principles

The following paragraphs summarize how the subarea and corridor plans collectively align to the Guiding Principles of the Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code update. Individual subarea and corridor plan summaries are available in subsequent sections.

Guiding Principle 1 – Enable more housing and mixed-use buildings, especially along roads with frequent bus service.

Subarea Plan Alignment Summary: Most plans are well aligned with this principle, supporting increased residential opportunities and a broader mix of uses along key corridors and within commercial centers. There is a strong emphasis across plans on leveraging existing and planned transit infrastructure to support higher-intensity, mixed-use development. Policies consistently call for a diversity of housing types and the integration of residential into commercial areas, which mirrors the intent of the proposed code changes. However, in a few older or employment-focused plans, such as Harmony, legacy use caps and suburban business park models limit the extent to which mixed-use development is encouraged, even though in practice, mixed-use has often been implemented. In general, the vision expressed in nearly all plans supports denser, more transit-oriented mixed-use areas, with only a few structural or zoning limitations that may affect immediate application of the updated code.

Guiding Principle 2 – Create resilient commercial and employment centers that are adaptable to future needs.

Subarea Plan Alignment Summary: The majority of plans strongly support adaptability within commercial and employment areas, encouraging a mix of uses and flexible development patterns that can evolve over time. Goals frequently include reinvestment in aging commercial properties, accommodating a broader range of business types, and allowing residential and retail uses to coexist with employment uses in a way that reinforces economic resilience. This principle is especially supported in plans focused on reinvigorating older corridors or key nodes of activity. A few plans with more rigid employment designations place some limits on adaptability by restricting non-primary uses, though even these acknowledge the importance of evolving to meet future needs. Overall, the principle of adaptable, mixed-use centers is broadly embedded across the planning documents.

Guiding Principle 3 – Create clearer building and site design standards that promote transit use, walking, and rolling along roads with frequent bus service.

Subarea Plan Alignment Summary: There is strong alignment with this principle in nearly all plans, especially those focused on corridor redevelopment or urban core areas. Plans consistently emphasize the importance of improving the public realm, enhancing pedestrian environments, and designing buildings and sites in ways that encourage walking and transit use. Frequent recommendations include better site connectivity, active ground floors, enhanced streetscapes, and reductions in large surface parking areas. These goals reflect a clear desire for more human-scale, accessible environments that support non-automotive travel, particularly

in areas with frequent bus service. While some older plans rooted in suburban development patterns are less focused on pedestrian design, they do not conflict with these goals and could accommodate improvements over time. In general, the direction across plans complements the proposed code changes aimed at making design standards more effective and transit supportive.

Guiding Principle 4 – Improve predictability of the Land Use Code, especially to support small business owners.

Subarea Plan Alignment Summary: Plans broadly support the concept of making development requirements more predictable and proportional to project scale. Many call for improved clarity and consistency in how zoning and development standards are applied, particularly in encouraging redevelopment or reinvestment in existing sites. The desire for a more transparent and streamlined process is common, especially in commercial areas and aging corridors where reinvestment is a priority. A few plans highlight the importance of ongoing community involvement, particularly around residential growth and neighborhood change, which can sometimes be at odds with simplified or expedited development processes. However, this concern is generally more relevant to residential areas than to commercial or mixed-use contexts. On the whole, the principle of code predictability is well-supported, with only minor tension in specific community contexts that place a high value on participatory review processes.

Individual Subarea Plan Alignment Summaries

Below is a brief summary of each subarea or corridor plan, along with an assessment of how well each aligns with the proposed changes to the LUC based on the specific Guiding Principles of the code updates. In the accompanying tables, color codes indicate the level of alignment for the plan with each guiding principle:

Green = The plan is mostly or fully aligned with the LUC guiding principle and would require little to no updates.

Yellow = Minor updates may be needed, or it is unclear whether the plan is in conflict with the LUC guiding principle.

East Mulberry Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

The 2023 East Mulberry Plan updated the 2002 East Mulberry Corridor Plan to guide growth and development in the area over the next 10-20 years. Informed by community input and internal policy discussions, it serves both as a guidance document for Larimer County prior to annexation and as a policy framework for areas that may become part of Fort Collins. The Plan also integrates recent planning efforts across transportation, parks, utilities, and small business support. The plan is generally well-aligned with the guiding principles, particularly in its support for mixed-use development, resilient commercial centers, and improved transit and multi-modal access along Mulberry Street. The plan emphasizes flexibility in land use, clearer design standards, and the integration of recent citywide planning efforts, all of which reinforce its focus on adaptability and long-term economic vitality.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by emphasizing the preservation of land for mixed-use and retail development near neighborhoods and by supporting improved transit options along Mulberry Street.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns by promoting flexible, resilient commercial centers that sustain economic vitality for businesses of all sizes while enhancing access to amenities and services for the community.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns by promoting clear design standards that enhance the safety, comfort, and visual appeal of multi-modal corridors and key gateway areas, encouraging active transportation and transit use.

4: Code Predictability	 Somewhat aligns with the development review spectrum by aiming for clarity and proportional requirements, though it may challenge existing upgrade thresholds defined in the spectrum; the plan area includes many small businesses that have voiced concerns about the future costs associated with development review.
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Downtown Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

The Downtown Plan provides a framework for building on the successes of Downtown's revitalization and the 1989 Downtown Plan, while addressing ongoing concerns and accommodating growth and increasing vibrancy. It places an emphasis on enhancing the pedestrian experience, allowing for increased density where appropriate while maintaining compatibility with Downtown's historic character and scale, and promoting a robust and vital local economy. Overall, the Downtown Plan is well-aligned with the proposed Land Use Code changes, particularly those around parking reform, allowing more density, strengthening urban design standards through moving to a more form-based approach, and encouraging a greater mix of uses.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by supporting increased residential density where appropriate, emphasizing a pedestrian- oriented environment over an auto-oriented one, and encouraging innovative parking management strategies to address the negative urban design impacts of current parking minimums.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns by emphasizing a vibrant and diverse mix of uses and identifying surface parking lots as key opportunities for future infill development.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns by supporting updates to pedestrian-oriented urban design standards, the development of new Building Types for non-residential buildings, and a shift toward a more form-based code approach.
4: Code Predictability	 Somewhat aligns by aiming to improve code predictability to support small business growth, though there may be some tension between new

Change of Use requirements and delay in achieving some of the Plan's urban design goals.

West Central Area Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

This plan contains policies, programs, projects and action items intended to support the quality of life in this core area of the city, bordered by Mulberry, Lake, Shields, Taft Hill and Drake. The topics addressed in this plan include land use, development, housing, neighborhood character, transportation and mobility, public services, parks and open space and environmental quality.

The plan generally focuses on housing, streetscape and nature/parks, but does also speak to the desire for mixed-use housing and vibrant commercial centers in this part of town.

Overall, the West Central Area Plan is in alignment with the LUC updates being proposed. One area of potential conflict is that the plan calls for robust community involvement in development review, which can be counter to improved predictability in at least the length of time the development review process requires. However, the call for community involvement stems from changes in residential uses more than commercial uses; this part of town sees ever-present conflict surrounding growth of the CSU student community.

Guiding Principle w/	Alignment Description
Alignment rating 1: More Housing Near Centers	Aligns by focusing on creating a walkable and bikeable environment near CSU's campus and the MAX/Mason Trail corridor, with an emphasis on housing and fostering a strong good-neighbor culture.
	 Somewhat aligns by briefly addressing the role of commercial centers and mixed-use housing, though land use guidance is primarily centered on residential neighborhoods.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Somewhat aligns through indirect support for employment areas, including those on Centre Road, by encouraging businesses to locate in underutilized commercial buildings and emphasizing safe places to live and work.
	 Aligns by recommending robust neighborhood involvement in the design process, which supports

	greater community buy-in and compatibility between uses.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns by providing design guidelines for mixed-use buildings that promote compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods, support for adequate vehicle and bicycle parking, and encouragement of a healthy tree canopy.
4: Code Predictability	 Somewhat aligns by emphasizing collaborative neighborhood processes and extra meetings to manage growth-related concerns, though this approach may reduce predictability for property owners and small business owners seeking to make changes.

Mountain Vista Subarea Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

The Mountain Vista Subarea Plan was originally adopted in 1999, shortly after the 1997 adoption of City Plan, and then updated in 2009. It addresses an area of the city that has been developing in recent years and encompasses a large portion of the undeveloped land within the Growth Management Area (GMA). The purpose of the plan is to guide future development to best integrate and connect with the larger community in alignment with City Plan, while creating a distinctive area within the City that offers a balance of employment, services, schools, parks, and a variety of housing options to residents and businesses. The objectives, framework, and policies contained in the plan speak specifically to evolution into a thoughtfully designed, accessible, people-centered area of the City that supports the breadth of daily life needs within the area – work, play, school, entertainment, restaurants. These principles are in substantial alignment and support of the proposed changes to the LUC.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Provides for employment, light industrial, retail, service and mixed density residential uses to be balanced and organized by function along corridors, with a walkable Central Community District (CCD).
	 Transit and multi-modal oriented design and function are encouraged to address transportation and community needs.

2: Adaptable Centers	 CCD envisioned to support a wide range of uses; with Neighborhood Centers serving daily needs.
	 Notes the need for higher density mixed-use residential near CCD and travel corridors.
	 Area is intended to serve as a primary transit hub, with supporting design and facilities.
3: Design Standards	 Discusses uses and design oriented to pedestrian access and experience, including "active street fronts".
	 Addresses land uses and design of gateway along I- 25, and orienting development to mountain vistas.
	 Encourages more traditional grid street pattern as a framework for future development.
	 Street design is discussed with significant efforts to design appropriately sized and functioning streets for intended use.
4: Code Predictability	NA – The Plan does not discuss code predictability.

Northside Neighborhoods Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

This plan contains policies, programs and action items intended to celebrate and preserve the rich cultural history of this part of Fort Collins while addressing long-standing inequities in infrastructure investment.

This plan does speak quite a bit about encouraging mixed-use and commercial development and preserving existing and fostering new businesses in the area. The Commercial Corridors and Centers update will not modify the standards of any of the zone districts within the area covered by the Northside Neighborhoods Plan. However, it was still included in this review because of its proximity to other areas that could be impacted. Zone districts in the Northside Neighborhoods Plan include:

- Downtown/ Innovation (D/I)
- Industrial (I)
- Low-density Mixed-use Neighborhood (LMN)
- Residential, Low-density (RL)

Philosophically, the Northside Neighborhoods Plan is in alignment with the LUC updates being proposed. One area of potential conflict is around standards and infrastructure improvements that aim to improve the function of urban spaces (provide parking, provide sidewalks, prevent flooding, etc.). On the other hand, the plan speaks quite a bit about the importance of supporting existing businesses and new businesses in this part of Fort Collins. It does not speak to how to strike the right balance with those goals.

Overall Summary of Guiding Principle Alignment:

Guiding Principle	
w/	Alignment Description
Alignment rating	
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns philosophically by encouraging mixed-use development.
	 Note: No zone districts affected by the proposed Land Use Code update are physically located within this plan area.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns philosophically by emphasizing a balanced mix of residential, industrial, and commercial uses, without allowing any one to dominate.
	 Note: No zone districts affected by the proposed Land Use Code update are physically located within this plan area.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns philosophically by calling for design standards that buffer residential and industrial uses from each other.
4: Code Predictability	 Aligns by expressing strong support for existing and new businesses in the area.
	 Aligns by identifying the need for improved landscaping, parking, and critical infrastructure upgrades, with an emphasis on shared cost responsibilities among the City, businesses, and residents.

Midtown Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

Midtown is a key portion of the College Avenue commercial corridor, spanning slightly over three miles from Prospect Road on the north to Fairway Lane on the south. The Midtown Plan supports the goals of expanding mixed-use development, creating resilient commercial and

employment centers, and enhancing transit-oriented mobility by articulating a clear vision that aligns with ongoing investment, improving multi-modal connectivity, and leveraging the MAX Bus Rapid Transit system. It promotes higher densities through supportive parking strategies, enhances the pedestrian experience with improved streetscapes and outdoor spaces, and reinforces a strong identity for Midtown through thoughtful design guidance, development prototypes, and implementation strategies.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by supporting mixed-use expansion through higher-density residential and commercial development along the College Avenue corridor, which is served by the MAX Bus Rapid Transit system.
	 Aligns by identifying Midtown as a key opportunity area for transit-oriented growth, reinforcing Land Use Code updates that promote more housing and mixed-use development in transit-rich areas.
	 As part of the Midtown Plan's vision for transit- oriented development, the TOD section of the Land Use Code was originally implemented as a direct follow-up to the Plan's adoption and the creation of the MAX Bus Rapid Transit system.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns by supporting a flexible, phased redevelopment strategy that responds to changing market conditions and community needs.
	 Aligns by integrating transit-oriented planning, adaptable development prototypes, and a comprehensive economic development toolbox that uses both incentives and regulatory tools to support long-term commercial and employment vitality.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns by providing clear design guidelines, development prototypes, and streetscape improvements that prioritize walkability, transit access, and active transportation.
	Aligns by encouraging context-sensitive parking strategies and promoting building placement and

	public realm design that support a safe, comfortable, and visually appealing pedestrian environment.
4: Code Predictability	 Aligns by promoting greater code predictability through streamlined development review processes and potential fee reductions for projects that align with the plan's vision.
	 Aligns by fostering a business-friendly environment that reduces uncertainty for developers and small business owners, encouraging reinvestment and growth in Midtown.

South College Corridor Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

The South College Corridor Plan is broadly aligned with proposed code changes. While large portions of the overall plan vision and goal are not impacted positively or negatively by the changes, the areas of greatest overlap remain around encouraging higher-intensity, mixed-use development near the South Transit Center, providing consistent and clear design standards for commercial buildings, and enhancements to the Change of Use process that could be utilized by existing business and sites that are nonconforming with existing standards but not yet ripe for larger redevelopment.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by encouraging transit-oriented development in the northern portion of the Plan area near the South Transit Center.
	 Aligns by supporting the reduction of lower-intensity, auto-centric uses and mitigating the impacts of large surface parking areas.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Not directly aligned, as the plan area contains no significant employment centers affected by current primary/secondary use issues.
	 Aligns by contemplating a broad mix of uses, including office, light industrial, and local and regional-serving businesses and retail.

3: Design Standards	 Aligns by calling for aesthetic and design improvements that enhance the corridor while maintaining its unique character.
	 Aligns by recognizing the opportunity for updated design standards to guide both incremental redevelopment and higher standards for new greenfield development on remaining vacant parcels.
4: Code Predictability	 Somewhat aligns through support for changes to the Change of Use process, which is particularly relevant given the number of substandard sites occupied by small businesses in the area.
	 Somewhat aligns by emphasizing the importance of allowing continued use and gradual upgrades over time, helping small businesses remain viable without being burdened by costly site improvements upfront.

North College Corridor Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

This 2007 plan is strongly aligned with the guiding principles. It envisions urban evolution with a more beneficial and synergistic mix of uses and a more downtown-like scale and pedestrian and bicycle-friendly atmosphere.

It specifically discusses design standards and issues of Change of Use requirements for small business.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by envisioning urban evolution and redevelopment with a more synergistic and beneficial mix of uses in a less auto-centric development pattern.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Not applicable, as this plan does not include use mix ratios; therefore, there is no conflict or contradiction with proposed Land Use Code changes.

3: Design Standards	 Aligns by calling for a tailored design character in the corridor's urban evolution, including the application of design standards and guidelines. Aligns by promoting the establishment of a unique identity, supporting all modes of mobility, and encouraging special design enhancements.
4: Code Predictability	 Aligns by addressing challenges related to Change of Use requirements for older properties, recognizing the need for flexibility in their continued use and adaptation.

Harmony Corridor Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

This plan is the only one of its kind in that it is adopted jointly with a separate Design Standards & Guidelines document. The two documents are considered integrally together in this audit and when "the plan" is mentioned, it includes both.

The original plan dates to 1991 with several subsequent updates. The corridor is largely built out, which was done generally in accordance with the plan.

The plan establishes two main land use designations along this 4.5 mile entryway corridor into the city from I-25: an "employment" designation and a "shopping center" designation.

Both designations allow for a mix of uses, however the employment designation emphasizes non-retail employment uses in suburban business park settings, with certain "secondary and supporting uses" allowed as mixed uses, but they are limited to 25% of any development plan.

The original overall vision was to provide opportunities for employers needing large buildings or campus-like facilities for tech, research, and institutional-type uses as a key part of the city's economy and jobs/housing balance.

The shopping center designation was added later in a 1995 update. That designation allows for all of the same uses, plus defined shopping centers in defined locations as a response to retail commercial pressure while avoiding a continuous commercial strip of freestanding individual commercial uses and still maintaining land for employment uses.

These differently defined shopping centers emphasize different types of retail and allow a complete range of uses, including multi-family and mixed-use residential. (One clear exception in the range of uses is drive-through restaurants which are not allowed; and gas stations and vehicle servicing uses are not allowed in the larger shopping centers.)

The plan is highly aligned with the guiding principles above, with the caveat that the employment designation's 25% limit reflects the deliberate vision to allow for single-use employment-focused development.

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

Guiding Principle w/	Alignment Description
Alignment rating	
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by allowing for mixed uses throughout the plan area, though the employment land use designation includes a cap on mixed uses. Aligns by allowing residential uses in employment areas without the cap when located above a primary employment use, offering added flexibility for vertical mixed-use development.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns by enabling flexible land uses, encouraging mixed-use development, and promoting pedestrian- oriented site design.
3: Design Standards	 Largely aligns through the inclusion of design standards and guidelines for the employment designation, though these are based on a landscaped suburban business park form that emphasizes the corridor image along Harmony Road.
	 Somewhat aligns by allowing "secondary and supporting uses" within business parks that must be integrated functionally and visually, although implementation has been inconsistent; development in the HC zone has often been characterized by parking lot—oriented layouts and suburban-style landscape buffers.
4: Code Predictability	 As noted, the Harmony Corridor Plan emphasizes employment uses and therefore primarily focuses on large industries rather than small business. Specifically, the Change of Use process is not discussed in this context.
	 In terms of predictable form resulting from the aspects of this plan that were codified and have been implemented, there is significant alignment. Excellence, quality, quality of life, and high

standards are pervasive aspects throughout the
plan.

I-25 Subarea Plan

Overall Summary of Plan Alignment:

Generally, the vision and goals of the I-25 Subarea are well-aligned with the updates proposed under the Commercial Corridors and Centers Land Use Code updates. The areas of greatest alignment include the vision for a compatible mix of uses, a variety of housing types and price ranges, as well as an interconnected transportation network that emphasizes walking, biking, and transit connectivity.

The I-25 Subarea Plan includes a planning area of 4,860 acres of land within the Fort Collins GMA (at the time of plan adoption in 2003). The study area generally follows the path of I-25 contained within the City's GMA boundary.

This plan also discusses the relationship of the I-25 Subarea Plan with the I-25 Corridor Plan, which is a plan jointly developed by the jurisdictions of Fort Collins, Loveland, Windsor, Berthoud, Larimer County, Weld County, Timnath, and Johnstown.

Guiding Principle w/ Alignment rating	Alignment Description
1: More Housing Near Centers	 Aligns by emphasizing mixed-use activity centers and the use of alternative transportation modes, which is consistent with the intent of the LUC updates.
2: Adaptable Centers	 Aligns by promoting a balance of residential, commercial, employment, and civic land uses and facilities.
	 Somewhat aligns by maintaining a more traditional approach to separate employment centers, while current LUC updates aim for a greater mix of uses within these areas, without compromising the employment base.
3: Design Standards	 Aligns by emphasizing high-quality design and built character, especially in commercial areas near interchanges.

	 Aligns by supporting well-integrated pedestrian, bicycle, and transit networks, consistent with LUC update goals for multi-modal connectivity.
4: Code Predictability	 Not directly applicable, as the plan discusses a mix of business types and sizes but does not address the specific topics covered in the LUC update.
	No conflicts identified.