

Chapter 3 – Vision

Over the years, it has become apparent that the overall vision needs to be clarified to guide revitalization and enhancement efforts. Various investors, decision makers, and interested parties, both public and private, want to know how their decisions and actions can contribute to positive community development, to maximize the value of those decisions and actions.

The corridor presents an unparalleled need for collaboration among neighboring owners, city departments, and other agencies, in adapting to circumstances in the corridor. The key is a vision with wide support, followed by ongoing conversations on a new generation of projects.

To meet this need, a multifaceted vision for the area's future has been developed through public discussion of the issues.



Overall Vision Statement

A series of interesting places evolve along the corridor, becoming more urban in the best sense of the word.

In general, this urban evolution leads to

- more efficient use of land,
- higher values,
- more complete public infrastructure, and
- more economic activity;
- while keeping the strong sense of civic ownership that led to this plan.

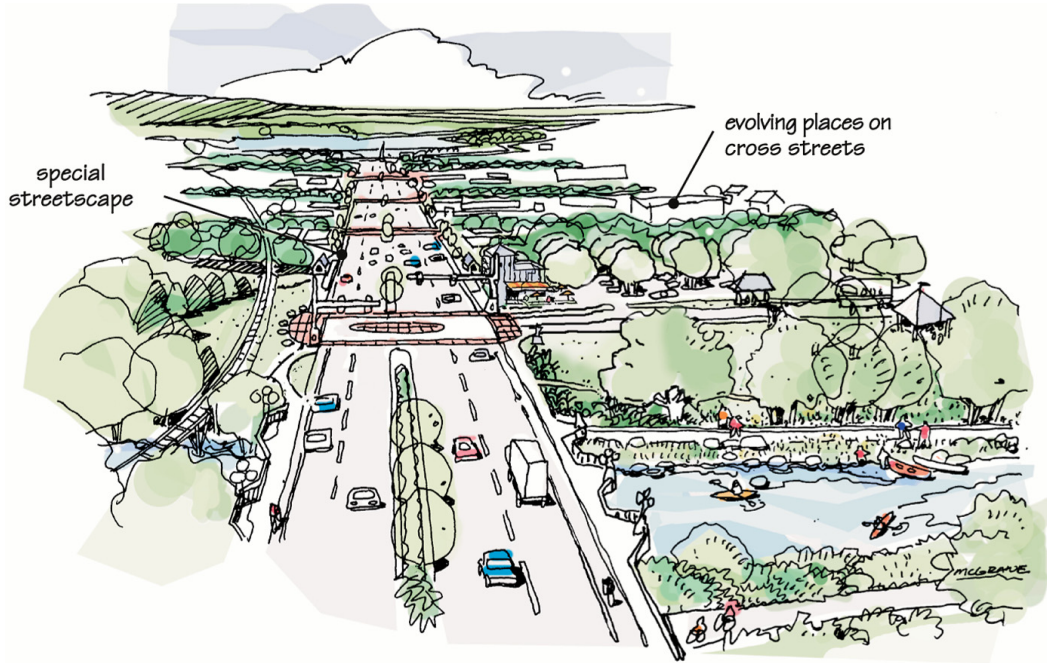
Active civic discussion continues to stimulate City projects, private sector redevelopment, upgrades to existing properties, and new development. Each project helps set the stage for further investment in real estate development and improvement projects in an evolutionary process. Where collaboration among multiple owners and City departments is necessary for changes to occur and be positive, it will be an increasing attribute.

The vision has different facets. It is not possible to make one simple statement about it. One attempt at a simple statement, heard during the process, is “fix the junky, but keep it funky”

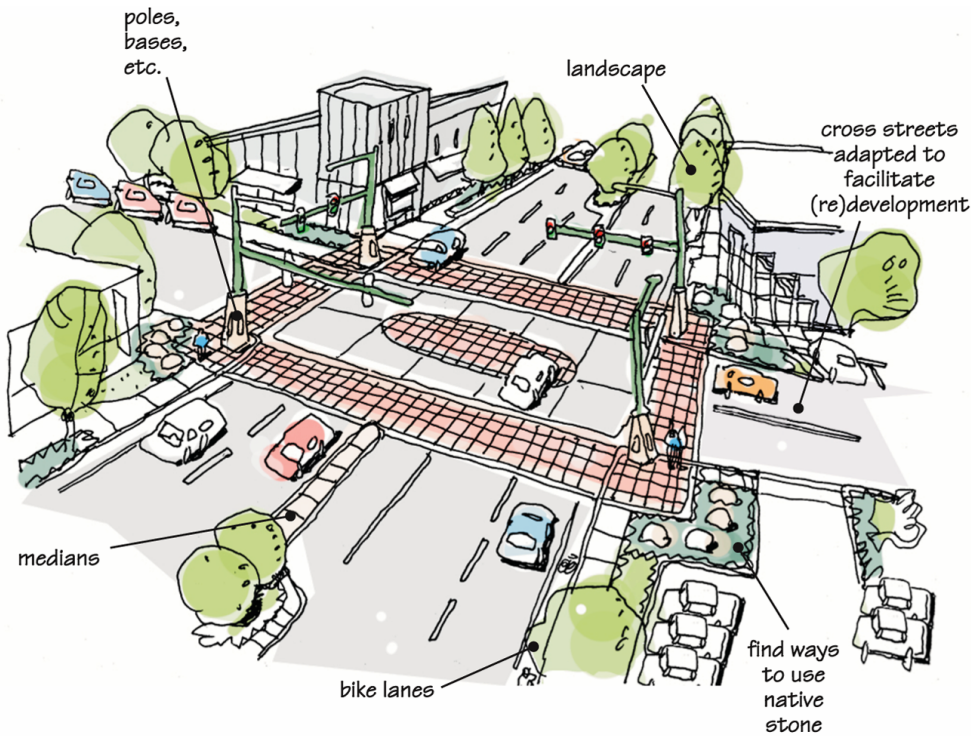
Facets of the Vision:

The Highway Itself -- North College Avenue/SH 14/US 287

The corridor stays naturally focused on the highway as its backbone. North College Avenue evolves into a more inviting and comfortable commercial street with an increasingly positive connotation to its name. This stretch of our main thoroughfare grows safer and more enjoyable for people of all ages and abilities who walk, ride bikes, and riding transit, as well as for car and truck drivers. North College Avenue is becoming a welcoming local and regional gateway. It fosters attention for travelers, and pride for the local community, as an interesting and attractive stretch of the *Colorado Scenic Byways* system. The highway emphasizes mobility for people and goods moving *through* the corridor and coming *to* pedestrian-oriented places, “more like Downtown”, evolving along inviting cross streets. Vehicle access to properties shifts away from the highway frontage itself a more complete network of cross streets and side streets, which invite parking.



This sketch captures the vision of North College Avenue as a primary transportation mobility corridor along the lines of standard arterial streets, but with special streetscape. Interesting places and street-fronts evolve along cross streets that feed into the highway.



This sketch captures some ideas regarding a whole strategy for the highway and its streetscape. Elements could include light and signal poles, special pole bases with identity elements such as native stone, North College logos, *Colorado Scenic Byways* signs, color themes, banners for seasons and events, and a unique landscape image. This sketch also leads into the next facet of the vision regarding cross streets adapted to fit circumstances and facilitate redevelopment.

Facets of the Vision:

More Complete Street Network

This facet of the vision is very closely related to the highway itself. Redevelopment and retrofitted public infrastructure projects add a more complete network of streets, drives, and alleyways. The network is forward-looking; supporting intensified land use as the area evolves, bringing access, utilities and urban services into formerly vacant and underused areas. The linear strip of North College Avenue is punctuated by new street corners, with cross streets leading to a diverse series of interesting places off of the main frontage.

New street corners do a lot of things:

- add value to development, helping pay for expensive new infrastructure,
- bring character of new places along side streets within visibility of College Avenue,
- calm traffic,
- create a more “town-like feel”, and
- generally make the linear strip more interesting with multiple new dimensions.

The layout and design of access and parking is finer-grained than in standardized new growth areas, with closer spacings as needed to adapt to compact development parcels, to existing development, and to desired scale and character of evolving new places.

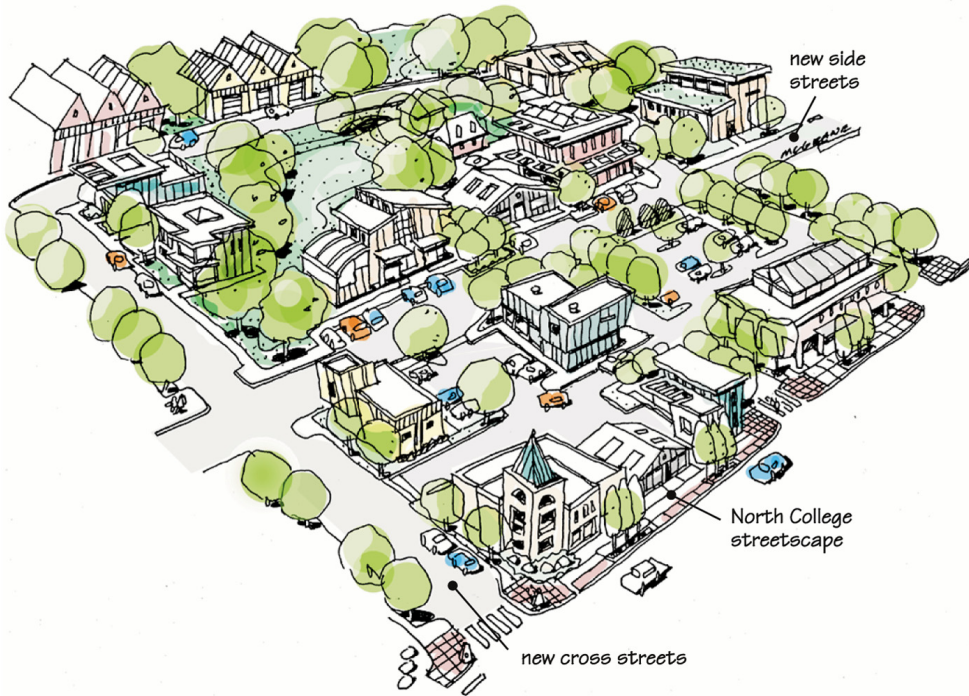
If a large footprint user can find an adequate site, they are welcomed and fitted into the overall pattern of new streets through careful, customized design adaptation.



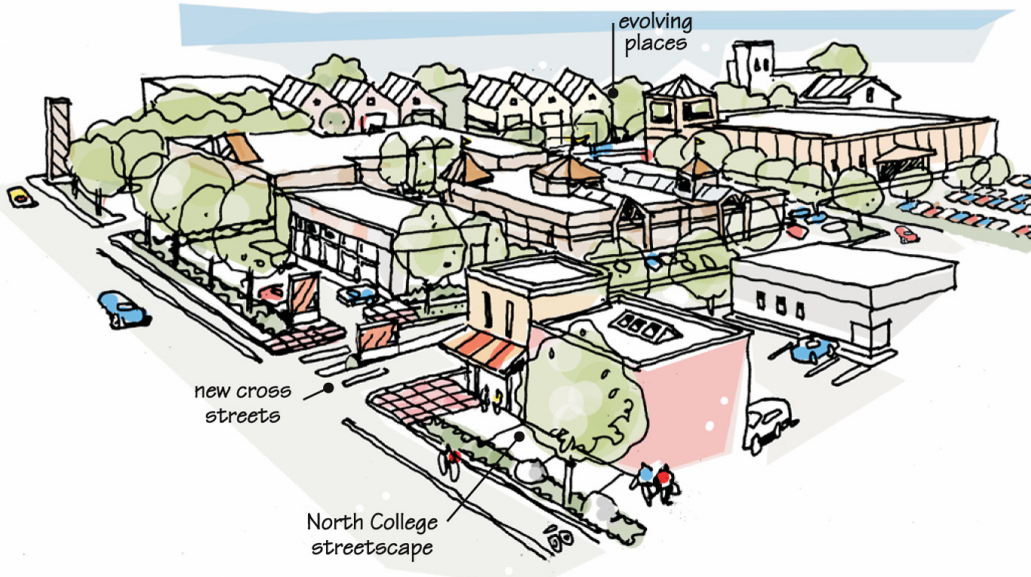
Left: Example of new development in an older commercial corridor. In adding new streets, land must be carved out of existing properties; the value of new corners can help make up for lost square footage. North College Avenue is expected to evolve with 8 or 9 new street corners, with more new corners in the network off the highway.

Right: Example of a new pedestrian-friendly cross street along a highway in a redeveloped semi-industrial area on the outskirts of a small city. Maximized on-street parking and a pedestrian-friendly place reflect aspects of the vision for places in the North College corridor.

Paths, trails, and landscaped drainage and utility corridors add to the network. The pattern and details of new infrastructure systems will be uniquely adapted to fit circumstances. New streets are sensitively fitted into evolving, funky places that are different than standardized new growth.



This sketch captures ideas for an example redevelopment area on the west side of North College, north of Hickory street. New cross streets and side streets are specially adapted to facilitate development, with on-street parking shown in response to the issue that as new streets use land, remaining land for development will be tight, and a street network can provide useful overflow parking. Also, street parking brings activity to new street-fronts and encourages pedestrian oriented building faces. The sketch indicates how a closely-spaced network of access can create modest building sites offering opportunities for small business, including current owners who wish to remain in the new format. It also captures the idea of storm drainage and detention as part of the framework, providing landscaped focal points for development.



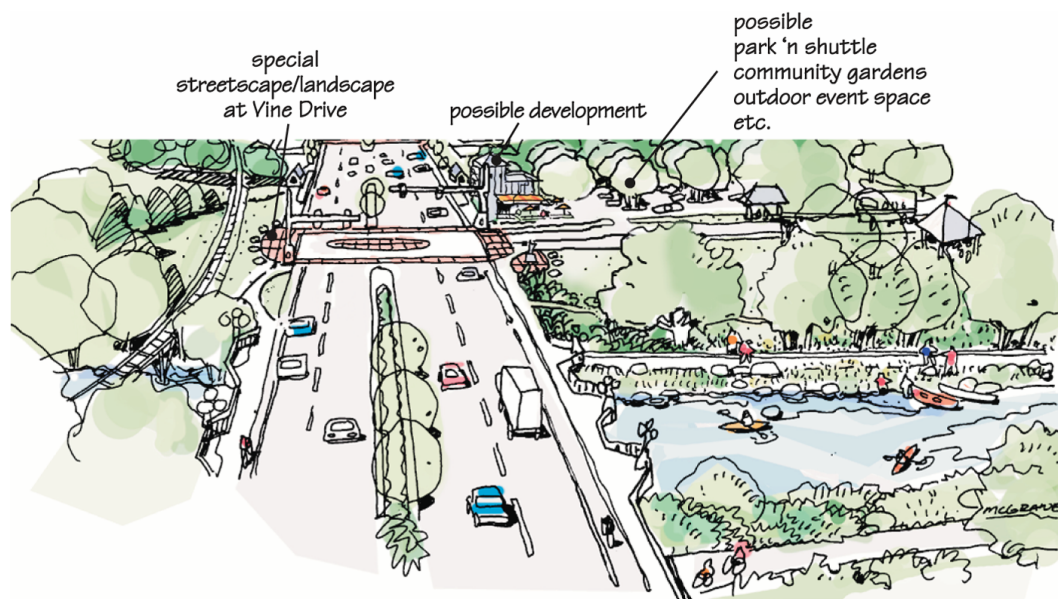
This sketch shows similar ideas, but includes the idea that large-footprint uses are a welcome part of the vision, if they can find a site. A new drive leads to rear areas on the east side of the highway. A sign providing visibility, which may be a necessary aspect of developing rear areas in some cases.

Facets of the Vision:

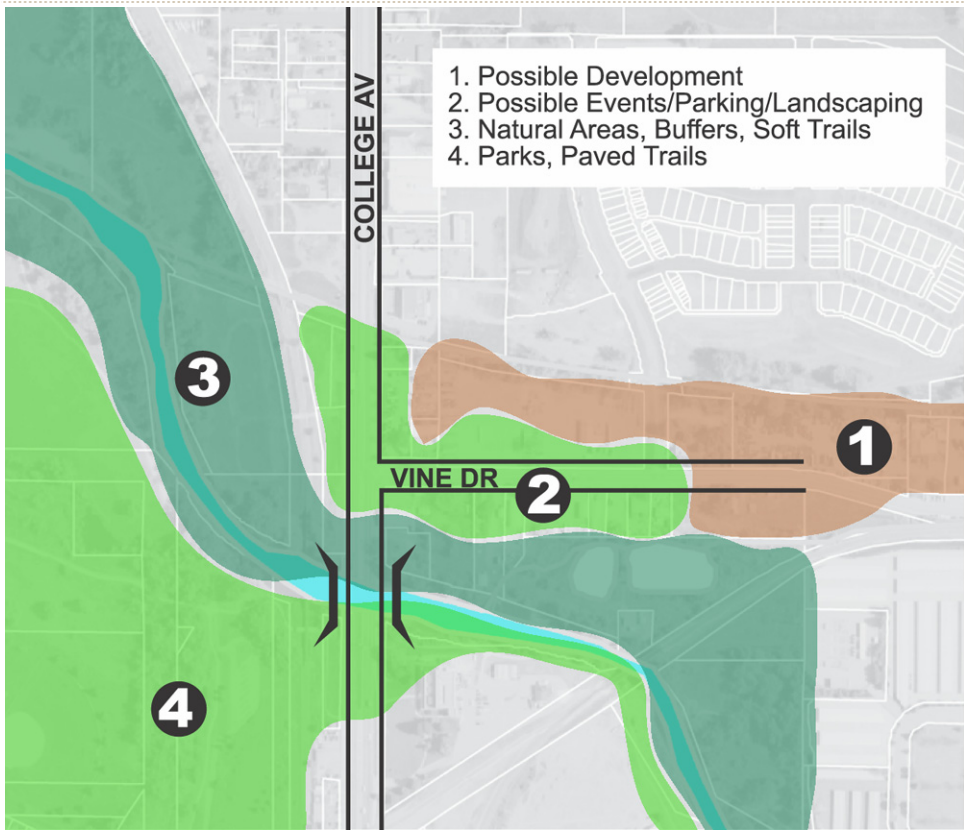
Connections to Downtown Across the Poudre River Corridor

The river corridor links and binds the North College corridor with Downtown and the rest of the community. People convene, collaborate, compromise, and find solutions to the complex problems of creating more attractive and active connections across the river corridor and its floodway.

Crucial public perceptions are transformed by an inviting and seamless transition, so that the river corridor is seen as an attraction shared with Downtown, rather than an edge and barrier as in the past.



Streetscape and landscape projects can create more attractive visual connections across the river corridor. A very careful balancing act is needed regarding facilities or events that invite the presence of significant numbers of people – this is a place where activity must be carefully considered in light of river flood flows, and the habitat corridor of the river.



Vine/North College area, with a diagram of general levels of activity as envisioned. This general vision emerged during plan discussion of possibilities for the river corridor. Generally, the lowest levels of human activity are most appropriate along the north bank. Intermediate levels of activity are most appropriate on the south bank and east of North College Avenue, with the paved trail, parking access, and park-like settings. Higher levels of activity, e.g., outdoor spaces for events, festivals, and markets, trailheads or other parking, and possibly a limited amount of actual development with buildings, would be appropriate higher up above street grade along Vine and North College.



Left: modest example of “re-branding” of an aging building – that is, creating a new image and identity (the “brand” in terms of public perception) to emphasize river influences in a positive light.

Right: parking lot with informal cottonwood grove and native stone is one modest example of detailing that could highlight the river. (A typical parking lot island would have a standardized spacing of individual non-native trees and shrubs.)

Facets of the Vision:

Community Appearance and Design

The corridor evolves in such a way that it keeps a unique and interesting feel, avoiding tendencies for standardization in new development. Design of development and public improvements responds to circumstances, history, and citizen preferences for a distinctive complement to Downtown.

Along North College Avenue, streetscape design elements highlight the outdoor recreation aspect of the region, the Scenic Byways designation, and the river.

Positive downtown-like design qualities such as interesting street-fronts with on-street parking and facing buildings, are carried northward and adapted to contemporary circumstances of the corridor in places focused on cross streets.

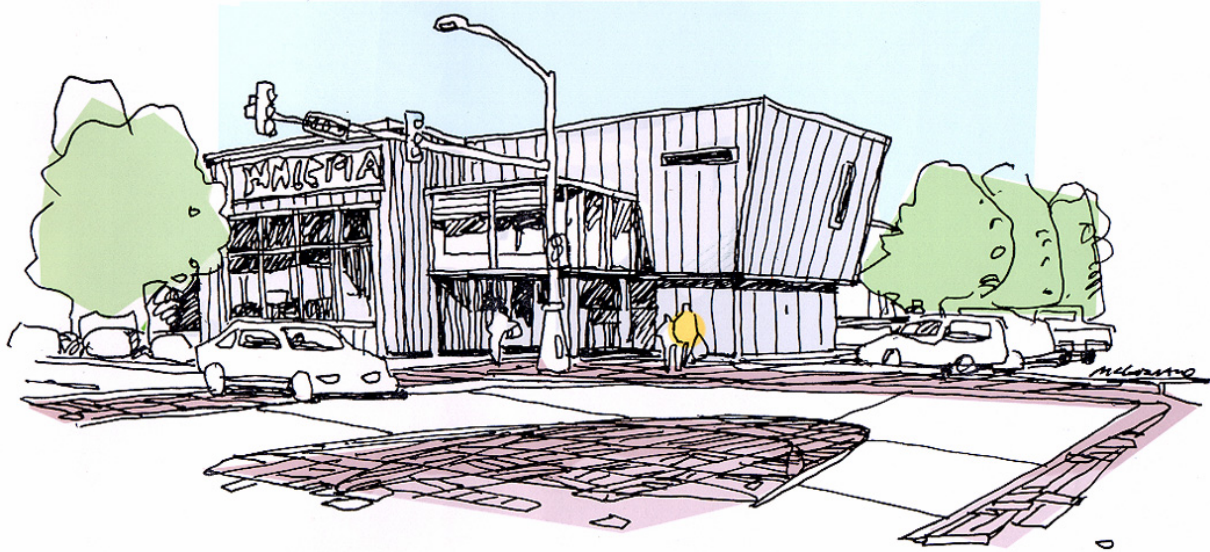
The nature of the corridor creates a special opportunity for design character in new buildings to offer an interesting counterpoint to newer suburban areas. Contemporary, semi-industrial building styles and materials offer particular opportunities to build up a fitting character which relates to the north-downtown setting.



Photos show examples of image and identity features – pedestrian bridges over canals and other streetscape structures offer a chance to use materials, colors, and special touches like flower baskets.



Examples of semi-industrial simplicity and informality. Simple materials and styles can have an authentic urban charm by emphasizing pedestrian-oriented building faces with glass, extensions, awnings, colors, signage, and well-kept planters. This kind of design is envisioned as having potential to create a fitting identity for key parts of the corridor.



City Plan and the Land Use Code already call for responsive design to fit local circumstances, vs. corporate prototype design. This sketch is intended to convey a general idea of what that could mean in the corridor, showing a new building and corner with contemporary semi-industrial styles and materials.



Examples of semi-industrial character made interesting with glass, projections, recesses, light, shadow, and internal use that flows out and contributes to a place.

Land Uses and Activity

The eclectic mix of uses evolves stronger underpinnings of higher-activity uses that create synergy, and contribute to a whole greater than the sum of the parts – in this case, a more active and healthy economy. The area still accommodates a broad mix of land uses, including service, repair, and supply-type businesses, but the general direction of change is toward housing, jobs, and commercial uses that bring more people into the area.

Commercial uses naturally fall in a range that complements Downtown, rather than competing – the corridor accommodates types, sizes, and styles of uses that don't fit Downtown, as in the past. Commerce continues to include vehicle- and tourism-oriented uses, and the corridor remains a secondary Fort Collins shopping and dining area, catering primarily to the comparatively small population north of the river.

A few exceptional retail attractions find a place in the corridor, and are able to draw from a larger market area -- most notably, businesses related to outdoor recreation, fitting the niche created by the Scenic Byways aspect of the Avenue. These uses bring the 'Great Outdoors' aspect of Northern Colorado and Wyoming close to Downtown as an added dimension.

Various studio, craftsman, workshop, repair, printing, food prep, and other modest light industry with pedestrian-friendly fronts mix with compatible urban dwellings in places along cross streets and back streets.

Some older small businesses remain even as redevelopment projects and larger corporate businesses bring higher-density, higher-value development. Some new re/development projects accommodate or relocate existing owners who wish to remain in the area in updated formats.

Hispanic culture is evident, with cultural characteristics featured in buildings and businesses in the corridor.

Different uses are integrated by the street network and by responsive architectural design. Even workshop, service, and repair uses contribute to the sense of place as building fronts are brought together along streets with generous glass and deep façade enhancements.



The vision for mixed uses has a strong tie to community design facets of the vision. In transitional areas behind highway frontage, businesses with pedestrian-friendly fronts can mix with compatibly styles of dwellings.

Facets of the Vision:

Public Support/Dealing with Change

Broad public support and active civic participation stimulate evolution toward the vision and goals. Collaboration will maintain the continued interest and active citizenship of those who have spent time and effort to focus civic attention on the area.

Discussion and education improve mutual understanding about tradeoffs between the need to hold to an overall vision, and the needs of individual property owners working with existing conditions and current market realities.

Education and understanding leads to collaboration on the infrastructure systems that have been missing: a drainage system and streets that need to cross subdivided land. Collaboration leads to successful land pooling among property owners in certain parts of the corridor where past subdivision has been an insurmountable obstacle to proper urban utilization of property. Public support also leads to new public/private partnerships in financing area-wide public improvements.



Discussion, collaboration, partnerships, etc. will be crucial to transformation of the corridor.

Facets of the Vision:

Financing and Administration

City investment in the Dry Creek floodway, which removed the #1 constraint to economic growth, leads to public/private collaboration on further financing and administration.

Active civic discussion continues to stimulate City projects, private sector redevelopment, upgrades to existing properties, and new development. Each project helps set the stage for further investment in real estate development and improvement projects in an evolutionary process. Where collaboration among multiple owners and City departments is necessary for changes to occur and be positive, it will be an increasing attribute.