

City of Greeley, Colorado
PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
January 10, 2023

(Excerpted)

8. A Public Hearing to Consider the Downtown 2032 – The Path Forward, Greeley Downtown Plan Update.

Commissioner Franzen excused himself from this portion of the meeting due to a conflict of interest.

Becky Safarik, Interim Community Development Director, introduced the Downtown Plan Update and stated that about 10 years' time has passed since the last downtown development investment strategy was completed. The City of Greeley determined an update would be helpful to assess the work to date and to maintain focus and momentum for the next decade. Coincidentally, the City contracted with the same consultant who did the previous plan. She introduced Brad Segal with Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA) to describe the Plan update.

Mr. Segal, introduced his team and described the process used to complete the study, noting that they heard from over 1,200 residents in the community who expressed an interest in Downtown. Mr. Segal said their team completed an analysis of existing conditions and tracked improvements over the last 10 years. He explained that they will provide everyone with an overview of the action plan and then be available for any questions or discussion.

Amanda Kannard, PUMA, reiterated how important it was that they were able to gather so many inputs from the community. She explained that there were a variety of topics discussed early on in the process at a roundtable discussion with an advisory committee that was made up of downtown stakeholders, including business owners, members of the Downtown Development Authority, property owners, and representatives from a variety of businesses. Ms. Kannard said they also had a technical working group that was made up of various city departments. She noted they also had a pop-up presence at one of the Friday Fests in summer fairly early on in the process. In addition to that input they also conducted an online survey that was distributed to the greater Greeley community which netted over 1,100 responses. After they had developed some preliminary recommendations, they hosted a community wide open house where they had nearly 40 people attend. Ms. Kannard stated they also conducted some focused outreach to historically marginalized populations.

She explained that some of the key themes heard from the stakeholder groups was that they want to ensure that Greeley is welcoming and inclusive to everybody who lives and works in or visits Downtown. They want to make sure that the DDA and City of Greeley continue moving forward with doing a good job at programming and activation of the area; bolstering the storefront economy; and maintaining its historic character. She also noted the importance of ensuring downtown is livable with such as dog parks, grocery stores, etc. Another priority was to continue to invest in infrastructure and infill development and underutilized spaces. Finally, she noted the importance of connectivity not only within downtown, but to neighboring communities as well.

City of Greeley, Colorado
PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
January 10, 2023

Ms. Kannard then highlighted a couple of questions and answers from the online survey, noting the top priority was to redevelop and repurpose underutilized spaces in downtown. Relative to priority services, the number one response was more retail and restaurants, followed by public safety and providing more services to address the unhoused population.

She stated that the existing conditions analysis was the other key that served as a foundation for developing the strategies and actions in the plan including a market assessment. The key findings was that housing is a robust market in downtown and will continue to be, moving forward. The agriculture and manufacturing industrial heritage that exists in Greeley is an enduring economic anchor that can be capitalized on into the future. The office market is likely to remain niche but there are some opportunities to have creative office spaces through small businesses, incubation, and coworking. Retail is a continued strength that would benefit from additional housing development. There are also some underutilized or untapped markets that exist for younger demographics, particularly UNC students and Latinx households, which are key opportunities moving forward.

Todd Wenskoski, team partner from Livable Cities Studio, said that the capital improvement assessment looked at the space from the property lines to the curb line. They found out that the eastern edge has the lowest quality because it's paired with historical industrial uses. He then said that areas around downtown formed a higher ranked quality due to the ongoing upkeep and the investments that have been made over time. Mr. Wenskoski stated that if you move further south the residential areas generally had a higher quality as well, partially due to historic character, etc. He stated the other thing found was although 8th Avenue and 9th Avenue have distinctly different characters one being more commercial the other one being a bit more mixed with historic district, they generally provide a really good north and south connectivity under the core of downtown.

Mr. Wenskoski stated that elsewhere in downtown, in most cases, where there is non-residential areas, especially with older, mid-century developments, they found that they didn't have great frontages because commercial uses sometimes had to have bigger access points and driveways.

He stated the other thing they looked at was regarding the public spaces and uses of downtown. They found the core is strong but there is an unequal distribution in some areas. He further explained that the area around Lincoln Park, including 8th and 9th Avenue are great but outside of that the character is limited. Mr. Wenskoski also stated they noticed the amount of area dedicated to cars, either through wide roadways, or surface parking that could provide an opportunity to repurpose such areas into more productive areas. He said that the bicycle infrastructure is good and getting better and can be built upon going forward. Mr. Wenskoski explained that one of the most important things they discovered was safety and lighting was great in some areas but really lacking in others.

Mr. Segel explained the action plan, recommendations, and how to proceed to implementation. He stated that they started with core values for what they want downtown to be like in the future, starting with the physical framework. He note the three

City of Greeley, Colorado
PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
January 10, 2023

categories with key recommendations. The first of that is economy, which is how the downtown can be more prosperous and create more jobs. The second is environment which gets into the physical realm of downtown. Lastly, is experience, which is how we activate downtown and what sort of experience one has coming downtown.

He stated that the previous plan had four different sub areas. They have now streamlined that into three sub areas within downtown that have similar character and also have distinctly different market opportunities. Mr. Segel stated that the three sub areas are central downtown, university uptown, and the railway district on the eastern edge of downtown.

Mr. Wenskowski said they went on to create the physical framework plan which guided a lot of the transformative projects into the action plan and touched on connecting downtown to the Poudre River both north to Island Grove and also east.

He spoke about how there were discussions on how to turn the railway district into something exciting and interesting that would create a different type of contribution to downtown. Mr. Wnskowski said that they spoke about diversifying the residential mix with different approaches in each sub area. They want to build off of the core area and still create a sub area that have identities and character relating to their history. He spoke about reinforcing the bike lanes and hopefully taking them a step further to enhance the corridor and carry forward the history. He stated that they also suggest reuse of existing buildings in creative ways and still providing outdoor seating with public art. The character of these two areas is different but they both contribute to downtown and the vision.

Mr. Siegel wrapped the presentation up by giving a summary of the action plan and actual recommendations. He stated that everything they presented is tied to the core values of the city. They want downtown to be welcoming and inclusive, prosperous and vibrant, a complete neighborhood that is accessible and connected. They also provided vision statements for the different elements of the plan. He stated they provided a series of charts and matrices that get into fine grained detail within each of these sections. Each section has strategies and then tactics that are assigned to specific stakeholders to be worked on. They also got into resources and sequencing many of these ideas are more near-term other ideas are longer term in the context of a 10 plus year vision or plan.

Ms. Safarik recognized their presentation by commending their work. She also recognized two other leaders in the project. Bianca Fisher with DDA and Ben Snow with City of Greeley Economic Health and Housing, both who were instrumental in making sure stakeholders were well represented.

Commissioner Briscoe stated that he was impressed with the tremendous amount of effort and work that has gone into this project. He questioned what all of that means for the Commission and why are they seeing this today. He also wondered how they are financing everything.

Ms. Safarik said because the downtown development plan is a part of the Comprehensive Plan by reference, the Planning Commission is asked to make recommendations on land use matters, such as this, to the City Council. She then stated that the city initiated this update using city resources because it is seen as a vital part of

City of Greeley, Colorado
PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
January 10, 2023

maintaining the economy and infrastructure within the community as well as a partnership with the DDA and the work of the Economic Health and Housing Department.

Commissioner Schulte wondered if there has been anything analogous throughout Greeley where there have been multiple zones coming together. Ms. Safarik said that downtown is unique in that regard because it's got so many partnerships. She said there are five tax increment districts in the city that focus on redevelopment and have the city and private development partnerships.

Commissioner Schulte asked if there's any sort of tension going forward as we move this downtown field into the railroad area and into that existing industrial land. He wondered if we would lose any economic resources in the process. Ms. Safarik said that it was a very intentional decision to include the whole railway corridor as a transitional district into industrial uses. She stated that it will further support "maker spaces" and some of the special uses they have on the east side of downtown and make it an industrial incubator space that allows smaller businesses.

Benjamin Snow, Economic Health and Housing Director, said there are great and creative reuse opportunities with the old agricultural industrial assets which can experience some new life with redevelopment. This could include a mixture of uses, it could be residential, or it could be some light industrial types of places, or live/work kind of arrangements. He opined that the exciting part about that whole railway district is that it opens up an area where we could keep the agricultural heritage alive but embrace some of these new things that are happening in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ms. Safarik also mentioned that she met with the executive director of the model train museum and reviewed their master plan which strongly complements what is planned for downtown Greeley.

Commissioner Schulte asked if, hypothetically, someone wanted to build a factory in Greeley where would that go? Ms. Safarik said that we have many areas that would be prime for that kind of use, particularly east and north of this area.

Mr. Snow stated that if you look at the overall land use plan for Greeley then there's a wealth of agricultural land between the airport and Hwy 85 which also is parallel with the railroad tracks. So, while the infrastructure is not fully in those areas yet there is enough land in those areas to reach a certain level of scale for industrial development, noting that the railway district in downtown would be really a different kind of product that is smaller scale space.

Chair Yeater opened the public hearing at 2:30 PM.

Bianca Fisher, Executive Director of the Downtown Development Authority, offered thanks to the City and all those that contributed to this project. She believes we've come a long way in the last ten years because of the partnership with the City and with private stakeholders. Ms. Fisher reflected on the opportunities that have come from the City's investment in 8th Avenue improvements and touched on the fortune to be a part of the creative district's public art programs. She noted several creative industries in the area

City of Greeley, Colorado
PLANNING COMMISSION PROCEEDINGS
January 10, 2023

and closed by saying how thrilled she is to have the City taking a strong lead on this plan and how grateful they are to be partners in this project.

Chair Yeater closed the public hearing at 2:33 PM.

Commissioner Andersen made a motion that the Planning Commission find that the updated study, Downtown 2032: The Path Forward, is consistent with the goals of the City's Comprehensive Plan and recommend its adoption and incorporation into the Comprehensive Plan by reference. Commissioner Briscoe seconded the motion.

Motion carried 6-0 (Commissioner Franzen recused).

Commissioner Franzen stepped back into the chambers to be present for the balance of the Commission meeting.

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