Topic 3: View Protection

General information:

Town Staff researched the codes in multiple municipalities to get a sense for those that would protect views. Staff looked at numerous codes and planning documents, and reached out to those that provided some reference to views or view protection. Municipalities contacted directly include: Castle Rock, Thornton, Aurora, Superior, Golden.

Castle Rock has the most substantial protections related to maintaining views from specific transportation corridors to key/identified skylines and ridgelines throughout the city, which translates into an overlay zoning district with height, color, vegetation, and lighting restrictions imposed within certain areas that could impact those views. Exhibit 3-1 shows a detailed mapping of these ridgeline and skylines, classified into major, moderate, and minor with varying degrees of regulation.

Thornton has no specific codes regulating views or protection – their planner indicated they impose only typical setbacks, height restrictions, and architectural requirements, with no specific requirement or reference to relative grading or other issues about which we inquired.

Aurora's land use code includes a Mountain View District overlay from one specific point, from High Point public park, and has specific height restrictions (Exhibit 3-2). Height is restricted to a total elevation indicated on that map, within that area.

Superior provides "view protection" to the mountains from major transportation corridors, but excludes the residential from these requirements. Non-residential buildings are required to face the short side of buildings toward single family areas. In multifamily developments, building separations with landscaping or parking are implemented. And buffers of 150 to 300 feet between multifamily or non-residential buildings from single family areas. There is also a submittal requirement for a view impact analysis addressing the views of the proposed development, but Staff found no specific standards or regulations for how that impact is accounted for in reviews and approvals.

Golden provides several references to "guidelines" for views, but there are no specific regulations or standards that must be met, and their planning staff indicates that "the City doesn't regulate viewsheds." It appears they want developers and owners to be aware of views, but does not require they adhere to any code to protect that.

Analysis and Recommendation:

Most communities do not regulate any viewshed or view corridor requirements. Those that do appear to have undertaken significant mapping studies to determine what they wanted to protect, and what specific properties and design elements to regulate. The Castle Rock mapping, in particular, represents a substantial investment of resources. Further research across the country and in planning resources has provided a variety of view protections of a specific thing, such as

Longs Peak, or of a section of a corridor, such as a river or mountain pass that have been identified as a community benefit – or in several cases a state or interstate benefit.

The buffer setbacks that Superior requires may be the closest we were able to find in our research that required substantial setbacks of multifamily and non-residential buildings from single family uses, but it's not clear that the intent was view protection – as relative heights or elevations are not mentioned – as much as a desired separation of uses and mitigating impacts from the higher intensity use to the single-family area. Staff did not find any such buffers required between single family uses.

To pursue this further and propose specific code language for this issue, Staff asks for specific direction from Council on:

1. What views Johnstown wants to protect (mountain range, certain peaks, river corridors, ag areas, etc)?

2. From where are these views "originating"? Such as a specific road corridor, one or several outlook points, existing adjoining structures, or property lines.

3. What elements of a development should we consider regulations for that might best produce the outcome you seek? Such as building height, separation, orientation, relative grade from historic, buffers, fencing, vegetation/planting limitations, and similar.