

August 3, 2009

Column

Big things happening along North College Avenue

Darin Atteberry
datteberry@fcgov.com.

When was the last time you drove down North College Avenue?

For years, North College remained relatively unchanged. Now, there are exciting improvements taking place along this corridor.

New retail and shopping centers, improved pedestrian-friendly landscaping, environmentally sensitive housing and thriving employment are soon to be a part of the North College community.

The North College area is a model for citizen involvement, planning and revitalization.

The residents and business owners along North College Avenue recognized the existing infrastructure was outdated. They began to discuss their vision for the future: a thriving corridor that welcomes change while honoring the existing culture.

To assure the unique character of North College continued to play an important role in revitalization, a group of business and property owners, the North Fort Collins Business Association, approached the city with a proposal to establish plans and tools to encourage appropriate redevelopment.

In response, the City Council established the North College Urban Renewal Authority in 2004. A URA develops public/private partnerships to strengthen and restore communities, provide new housing or business opportunities, and ultimately enhance the quality of life for the public benefit.

Three URA-supported projects are already under way and will ultimately change the North College landscape.

A brand new shopping center, complete with retail and business services, will soon occupy the corner of Willox Lane and College Avenue.

Close by, the Union Place development will offer new, environmentally friendly housing and mixed-use development.

The Fort Collins technology incubator, RMII, will build a new facility on Vine Drive and College Avenue.

Add to that the city's public improvements to address the safety, operations and aesthetics of College Avenue between Vine Drive and the Hickory/Conifer intersection and you have a renovated area that supports retail, residential and business needs.

The alignment and vision of business owners, the mayor and City Council, and city staff have firmly placed North College on the path toward a great future.

The transformation of North College is a bright spot in a time when it's easy to find discouraging economic news, but it's not the only silver lining.

Designs for a new state-of-the-art Fort Collins Museum and Discovery Science Center are under way, and construction is slated for 2010. The Mason corridor is becoming a reality with the new bus rapid transit service (similar to light rail) scheduled to begin at the end of 2011.

These projects are smart investments in the long-term health and vitality of Fort Collins.