Policy Choices and Proposed Directions
Feedback Submitted via Email
July 2010

The following comments were submitted via email to the planning team in response to the policy choices and proposed policy directions presented at the June 29 and 30 Plan Fort Collins community workshop topic sessions, and the corresponding online materials and extended focus groups. This feedback will be reviewed and considered along with all other feedback collected during Phase 2 of the Plan Fort Collins process.

Response #1
Plan Fort Collins is developing a vision of our city’s future 50 years from now. Such a vision has many facets and among the most important is livability of our neighborhoods in 2060. One part of town that needs special consideration is Midtown. Midtown will be a very dynamic part of any future vision for several reasons:

1) It is the heart of the Mason corridor, the spine around which much transit oriented development will occur;
2) It houses a main activity center in the city, CSU, which presently serves over 40,000 residents: 25,000 students (20,000 of whom live off-campus) and over 6,000 employees plus their families;
3) Several Midtown neighborhoods are of an age and condition where critical decisions must be made about what their character will be in 2060;
4) It is a part of town which can play an important role in addressing some of the challenges which need addressing by Plan Fort Collins—neighborhood livability, affordable housing, energy efficiency, green transportation solutions and retail revitalization.

One question to be answered in Plan Fort Collins can be summarized as: how do we provide affordable, energy efficient housing in vibrant neighborhoods close to activity centers with practical alternatives to auto oriented transportation. Considering Midtown, this question has three potential answers:

- Develop higher density housing near the CSU campus oriented to the needs of students. There are numerous infill sites convenient to CSU and along the Mason corridor which can serve this need. A recent survey of housing types in communities with a major university pointed out that Fort Collins has an insufficient supply of such higher density housing.
- Redevelop Campus West to adequately serve the CSU activity center. Make this a top priority among the retail redevelopment needs of Midtown.
• Preserve and revitalize single family residential neighborhoods in Midtown. This will effectively serve the needs of CSU employees and students who wish to live in a viable family neighborhood in close proximity to their employment or classes. Mid-town neighborhoods offer many locational advantages: convenient to employment, neighborhood shopping centers, parks and recreational facilities and well served by alternative transportation-buses, bike paths/lanes and pedestrian ways.

However, challenges facing several of these neighborhoods include degraded housing caused by decades of violation of zoning and municipal ordinances, inadequate property management and a high proportion of transient renters. The result is distressed neighborhoods which are over the tipping point in terms of single family residential quality of life. Continue strengthen the existing programs addressing the causes of degraded housing as a first step in revitalizing these distressed neighborhoods.

Fort Collins is struggling at the same time with providing affordable housing of all types, including single family residences. Residential housing in Midtown was mostly built after World War II with modern building materials and construction techniques in accordance with well designed building codes. These sound structures can serve as affordable housing through rehabilitation at much less cost than building new. Rehabilitation would include energy and water conserving elements (energy efficient windows, doors, furnace and water heater, insulation, weatherization, low flow plumbing fixtures, etc). Rehabilitation can recreate these once vibrant neighborhoods with the locational advantages of Midtown. Restoring these neighborhoods to their zoning designation-single family residential-will contribute significantly to meeting the Plan Fort Collins vision of neighborhood livability.

Response #2
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Plan Fort Collins material dated June 2010. I have attended one focus group on the Poudre River and two community workshops, and, after some reflection, have the following specific comments regarding several of the Environmental Resources policy choices. It is clear that there are many important connections and feedbacks among them all. To that point, I think you need to especially consider the links between the environmental components and High Performing Communities if only because these links may not otherwise garner the attention they deserve. I am thinking explicitly of the relations between ENV11 & 12 and economic health, environmental quality, recreation, and the overall quality of our community. The river, after all, is the most tangible thread that weaves our community together.

ENV11 – Water Supply Planning - Balance water supply planning and conservation – support with improvements

Policy - I agree that the revisions to the water supply and demand management policy are important and I look forward to reviewing the next draft when it is available. I would strongly encourage the drafters to reopen a previous decision regarding the drought criterion (i.e., 1-in-50 year) as this is an extremely sensitive parameter in the overall planning ‘model’. I recognize that the drought criterion was reviewed by the Water Board many years ago, but times change and I am not in the least sure that the full consequences of the sensitivity of this parameter was explored at that time by Council. If the criterion were changed to a 1-in-35 year trigger, for example, the implications for needed water storage (Halligan) would likely be far different and far less costly.
Regarding the City’s “support” of local agriculture, I’m all for it. But there are likely ways to partner among all concerned to support multiple objectives, including riverine ecosystem health. Further, the definition of what’s “local” should not prejudice one to look only at upstream farming activity. Downstream works too. Finally, it is inevitable that some water will be removed from regional agriculture in the future for a whole variety of reasons. How to best use that water is what is important. As riverine science has advanced, society has become more aware of the ecological costs of water extraction. We now struggle to retrofit our social goals (like Plan Fort Collins) to include preservation of riverine ecosystem health. The way to do that is to reframe what we now view as water allocation among competing interests into a new objective -- maximizing social benefits by putting ecosystem goods and services (such as those that could be generated by the Poudre) on the same footing as other societal demands; promoting efficient, integrated river and land management; and pursuing incremental restoration with an eye on long-term sustainability. This major challenge is being tackled world-wide in ways that that will shape flows in rivers forever; let’s work on the Poudre!

Proposed Direction – Regarding water conservation, I would like to see the City explore options to link water conservation to improved instream flows in the Poudre. There seem to be two mechanisms to do this, either a voluntary utility check-off/subscription similar to our energy check-off programs or, more germane perhaps, the ability for a ratepayer to target his own water conservation to instream flows. Both have merit and both should be explored – sooner rather than later.

ENV12 – Cache la Poudre River – Support a resilient Cache la Poudre River – support but needs refinement

Policy Choices – I agree that the issues are complex, but that’s why the opportunities are so great! First, however, let me comment on your choice of the word “resilient”. It’s a fine word, but I am not sure that it alone captures the “meet multiple objectives, including a clean water supply, a functioning ecosystem, and recreation opportunities” over the long term. I wonder why you shied away from the word “sustainable” that is otherwise so prominent in the Plan Fort Collins materials? Most any set of actions will result in a functioning ecosystem and recreation opportunities of some sort, but not necessarily the sort of ecosystem that people I know really want. You get close when you say “ecologically meaningful instream flows ensures that the river ecology can be maintained to support aquatic systems (fish and invertebrates) and the life that depends on the river.” Maybe that phrase should be the upfront definition. Or here’s another from the literature, ”A healthy stream is an ecosystem that is sustainable and resilient, maintaining its ecological structure and function over time while continuing to meet societal needs and expectations.” You might see if you can reword ENV12 to reflect a broader mandate, and while you are at it, I personally would like to see a restoration component towards historical river flows – river rejuvenation as it were – as a goal.

Proposed Directions - Regarding the feedback topics listed on your forms:
A. I agree that coordination with other cities is needed. I’m thinking here of Greeley and Thornton regarding opportunities for preserving and enhancing both peak and winter flows.
B. I agree that we need to carefully think about how to best protect and restore riverbanks, but would caution against rigid embankments. Building around a river is tough; they are dynamic by nature. Disasters happen when nature swings to an infrequent extreme, interacting with human-derived systems that are marked by
arrogance, greed, ignorance, or laziness. I believe bank restoration should be researched in much the same way as the City has done with low-impact stormwater infrastructure. Finally, trust the engineers to stimulate ideas and options, but plan for eventual failure and always build with an eye towards aesthetics.

C. I agree that education about water conservation should remain an objective. But I would add to that an educational component -- the need to educate ratepayers (and all citizens really) about the benefits of a healthy river and riverine community. I would like to see a partnership between the Water Utility and Natural Resources, Planning – and public enterprises such as New Belgium and AB – to consider a series of kiosks along the river explaining the importance of the natural hydrologic cycle, watershed protection, upstream and downstream water quality, and so on. People need to know where their drinking water comes from and where their wastewater goes. There are many educational opportunities. An educational component would also fit nicely under LIV-10.

D. I am not sure what is meant by “trade urban/agricultural water use.” As you know, we generally rent “surplus” raw water if available. As alluded to elsewhere, the City should consider multiple objectives and acknowledge inevitable trade-offs. But when push comes to shove, my vote will be to support river restoration.

As a final thought, with the caveat that I have not read the whole plan, what I have seen would greatly benefit by making the plan a more uplifting, inspirational document. A tall order I know, but at some point, minimize the process and focus on the exciting things that a truly high performing community has done, and will do even better in the future.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments. Though I am a member of the NRAB, these comments are from me alone.

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**Response #3**
**Toward Making Fort Collins A “World Class” City**
**The Establishment of a Fort Collins International Resource Center, Associated with the “Our Global Village Museum and Learning Center”**

As a participant in several of the Plan Fort Collins events, I am struck by the use of the term “World Class City” associated with Fort Collins, but I found nothing in the plan that would indicated that the “world” is in the plan in any significant way. I believe that there are some opportunities coming together that would solve that problem. I propose that it is now time for Fort Collins to establish an International Resource Center to provide a more visible focal point for our the many people with international roots and/or interests, and to provide a more welcoming environment for internationals living and working in Fort Collins.

Fort Collins over the past several decades, like much of the US, has experienced a significant increase in the internationalization of its population, businesses and in the experience and outlook of its people. Local businesses with international interests as well as businesses headquartered in other countries look to our city as a potential place where they can establish an operation where their international interests can be served, and where families from diverse backgrounds can settle and find a welcoming community. As Fort Collins continues to draw attention as one of the most attractive places in the U.S. to live and work this will continue to be a feature of our economic growth.

Approximately 1,400 foreign students and scholars are associated with Colorado State University each year, and with them they bring family members who live, work and shop in Fort
Collins. For many years the focal point for international activities and for finding an internationally-oriented community in Fort Collins has been driven by the population associated with Colorado State University. The Fort Collins International Center provides programming and hospitality for students and scholars who come to CSU.

Internationalists who are not affiliated with Colorado State University but who are able to connect with and become a part of this existing international community report that it is generally a positive experience, however those internationals who come to the city and don’t find their place within the CSU program report finding it very difficult to know how to connect and become integrated into the life of the City. Even those who move their families to Fort Collins and work at CSU report that it is difficult to become integrated into the student and scholar-focused programs. Like anyone moving to a new culture, temporary and long-term international visitors to our community need different kinds of information and support.

A group of motivated individuals are working to establish a home for collections that are being given to the 501.c.3 “Our Global Village Museum and Learning Center.” This will provide visible evidence of the international interests and mindset of many of our citizens, and an interesting anchor for such a Center. We believe that in addition to this it is time for Fort Collins to begin a Council for International Visitors (CIV) that could be associated with the National Council of International Visitors- the organization that programs visitors for the U.S. Department of State. At this time Fort Collins and CSU provide programming for the CIV’s located in Denver and Boulder. This program brings groups of high-level international visitors to communities and campuses to learn about specific activities and approaches. This provides international visibility for Fort Collins and the businesses and programs within it. The Resource Center would also provide a place where internationally-oriented people from Fort Collins and those who are originally from other countries can find people who are trained and informed about working with internationals, and who can help them find a place in our city.

International residents contribute greatly to the development and education of the Fort Collins community and provide priceless service in helping our citizens understand the world. It is time for Fort Collins to recognize that and to provide a place where interactions can be facilitated more easily. I have had discussions with city staff when they have had inquiries about starting a “Sister Cities” program, but there has been no focal point for pursuing that effort. We believe that opportunities of that nature will become more in demand, and we need to prepare to respond in a way that will support the development of a more diverse and welcoming community.

Our vision is to combine Our Global Village Museum and Learning Center and an International Resource Center into one place that will show locals and visitors alike that Fort Collins is truly a globally-minded community that welcomes others and that understands the importance of preparing our population to work in a globally integrated world. The Museum will provide an interesting and welcoming anchor that will attract visitors to downtown, the Center will provide a place for educational programs about the world for K-12 and university students and for individuals in the city who work with internationals. If the concept is morphed into a community International Resource Center it will become a place for people to go to learn more about what we have to offer, and a place where intercultural training can be conducted, and programming can occur for international visitors, prospective residents and businesses. Our local links to the start of Peace Corps, and the way that the people of Fort Collins have embraced the world in the search for new technologies to assist people, and the internationally-based or internationally focused companies that have selected Fort Collins can all contribute to the creation of the
Center. I truly believe that this is a needed and important addition to our community, and a concept that is overdue.

As a board member of Our Global Village and as the Director of International Education at Colorado State University I have some ideas that I would like to share with you, and I am willing to work on making this a reality as Fort Collins moves forward with its planning for the future.