Plan Fort Collins Question of the Week:
Q3 - Economy

As the City moves forward, redevelopment will become an important aspect of our economic health. What are the best ways to encourage high quality redevelopment and where are some important areas to focus these efforts?

Responses submitted via Online Comment Form:

Answer: Turn brown fields into solar farms or community gardens.

Answer: Encourage innovative uses of space. For example, tear up the acres of concrete around the Mall, and encourage walking/biking. The huge parking lots where cars can zip through in every direction are a nightmare. Some green areas/landscaping would be nice. In fact, tearing that eyesore down and doing a new mixed use development might be in order. Encourage new, upscale merchants to locate, not just another big box store. The new Front Range Village is a more user-friendly environment than the Mall. Several factors in this are outdoor seating in cafes, and the Library. In addition, do not allow over-restrictive flood plain regulations to stifle development. The latest salvo from the City regarding North College development was ill-timed and at odds with what the City seems to be trying to do out there. All departments should be on the same page before issuing edicts/pronouncements.

Answer: I am in full support of the redevelopment along College Ave. The saddest thing to me is to see businesses close down, then sit empty...for years, while new building are being built all over town. I think it should be mandate to redevelop where these buildings sit. Hopefully with the addition of the Mason Corridor this will be more common practice. Specifically the shopping center south of King Soopers on College and the 'old' Wal-Mart building down on Harmony.

Answer: Following the most recent housing boom and bust, high-density mixed use development, co-housing, and smaller single family units seem to be the new model. The conversion of the old Southglenn mall in Denver to a mixed-use entertainment complex and walking mall is a prime example. Commercial space in midtown should be occupied by more than just retail business, which don't always survive long term. Instead, this space should include professional businesses (e.g. law and accounting firms), service-based companies, medical offices, and non-profits. Residential space should accommodate renters, buyers, college students, singles, and multigenerational families.
Answer: The Plan needs to consider that gasoline and diesel fuel will become more expensive and scarce, with important impacts on Fort Collins economy. How vulnerable is our community to fuel price shocks or shortages? What can the City do to prepare itself, its citizens and businesses to thrive despite such shocks? All products and services that rely on gasoline for transportation will be affected. Food is a good example...on average each food calorie consumes 10 fuel calories in its production, processing, packaging, transportation to market, and refrigeration, so food prices will rise with fuel price. Businesses that rely on just-in-time delivery may have to revise their business models, because truck delivery may become cost-prohibitive or unreliable. Globalization depends on cheap transportation, and it will likely be reversed by the rising cost of fuel. Local economic health will depend on re-localizing not only food production, but also energy production and manufacture of essential goods. The communities that will survive and thrive in the future are the ones that look ahead and prepare. The City could convene a Peal Oil Task Force for the purpose of examining just how vulnerable we are and what may be done to make our community more economically resilient in response to fuel price shocks or shortages.

Answer: Of the two ideas you suggest I recommend prioritizing infrastructure improvement. It will have to be done anyway, so it's best to get a jump on it. Financial incentives for development or redevelopment can follow.

Answer: Support of independent businesses and startups, with incubators and other structures in place to encourage a flourishing creative culture (in arts, engineering, and other areas). Simplify (or at least clarify communication on) requirements for businesses within the city and county. This is a very complex place to start a business. Many of us do it anyway, but we waste a lot of time and money figuring things out that should not get in our way (example includes all the different types of permits and taxing structures, which are far more difficult than they've been in other locations where I've lived and had businesses). I was recently in a state in New England and coveting some of the live/work spaces available at reasonable rates.

Answer: One part of town that need 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. CSU has growth plans which will be implemented during this planning period;
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 and 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.

**Answer:** Thoughtful redevelopment is important, but should not be done in a way that encourages commercialization of residential neighborhoods. Often we hear that a conversion from residential is justified because a property is on a busy street or near the border of a commercial zone. I think the idea of “live-work” development is laudable, but should not be pursued in current residential zones, especially the NCL zone. I also think that East Side/West Side Design standards should be revised to prevent the continued demolition of small houses and replacement with larger, out of proportion houses. I suspect that sometimes this is justified as “redevelopment” and this should be addressed.

**Answer:** There should be a focus on mixed-use development that integrates residential areas with commercial and business uses, so that a strong sense of community can grow there and people may have access to jobs right where they live. Having a community that truly thrives 24 hours a day (rather than business areas empty at night or residential areas empty in the daytime) will help to keep eyes on the street and maintain safety. Integrating active living senior communities into these areas can be a good way to ensure people are in the vicinity throughout the day, helps to bring a bit of diversity to the community and encourages involvement instead of isolation for seniors. Ensure that businesses are not all chains - create a policy that gives space and perhaps tax benefits or other incentives to local businesses locating in these new areas. Development types and business mixes should cater to a diversity of ages/interests/clientele to encourage full community participation in the local economy. Family, student, senior, and a variety of budgets/incomes and backgrounds. Any development that is primarily residential should provide a mix of housing types and potentially a mixed cost structure to accommodate subsidized housing or renters as well as owners. Be sure to include some green space or connections to surrounding green space! No gated communities - create
areas where people can build a community but also emphasize connections to the surrounding city and the overall FC community! Parking Lots should be used as much as possible for infill redevelopment to bring these projects into existing communities with established infrastructure. If parking is really needed on a large scale, it can be stacked or undergrounded as part of the design. Look at areas along existing transit lines to build upon the ridership base. The photo above of the vacant area along College, and also the photos I have seen of potential redevelopment in the WallMart lot are exactly the right kind of areas to focus on. There are also some smaller-scale opportunities for reinvestment east of downtown toward Riverside and North of downtown, south of the tracks. Some work has already gone into these areas and it's starting to really turn around. Please keep it up! Thanks for this effort. Fort Collins is a great town and it's inspiring to think of all the ways it can get even better!

Answer: It's always been surprising to me that there are no restaurants along the Poudre. Every other city I have visited seeks to use the river to enhance the downtown visitor experience. I think Old Town is terrific but I think it would be even greater with a "riverwalk" with restaurants and shops.

Answer: As an avid bike trail user, I believe extending the Mason Street bike trail completely from Drake Street into Old Town would go a long way towards helping to give the university students a greater selection of businesses that are more easily accessible, as well as allowing residents from Midtown and south a more direct route to Old Town. A bike trail is a lot less expensive to install than a bus route during this economic climate, yet it could be the first step to promoting a more cohesive sense of local community if the trails were more than mainly recreational and connected major commerce hubs.

Answer: I feel that the city has done a good job putting renewed focus on North Fort Collins. I think that the city should continue to focus on the North as well as the renewed interest in Redeveloping mid-town. The mid-town area is a great example of an area that could be revitalized and renewed without physically "stretching" the city any further. Focusing on mid-town would allow greater access to public transportation and access to existing businesses while maintaining a more sustainable model of economic improvement. South FC has been well developed and still has future opportunities. However, I feel that it is in the city's best interest to focus on the mid-town and North FC areas to allow for a denser infill of businesses and residential so as to increase our core population density. This would allow for a greater opportunity for public transportation, bike paths, the Mason Corridor and other public entities to be used at a greater capacity without extending our resources a great deal more. I feel that looking at height restrictions and several zoning ordinances that would allow for a greater population density to be developed would be in the best interest of Old Town, North Fort Collins and Mid-town. Thank you.

Answer: As the City moves forward, redevelopment will become an important aspect of our economic health. What are the best ways to encourage high quality redevelopment and where are some important areas to focus these efforts? Gut the ability of any government to abuse the Urban Renewal Authority statutes. Hang a big sign over Harmony Road heading east and 287 heading south urging Fort Collins shoppers to spend their retail dollars on this side of the interstate/open space. Tax gasoline as part of a regional transportation authority. Don't allow any talk of an RTA unless it is funded by gas taxes. Require sprawlers to engage in a credit trading scheme where McMansions can be built without requisite multi-family housing in an area if they purchase "dense development credits" from developers financing projects in redevelopment areas. Loan out $5.3 million dollars to the first applicant to come forward with anything resembling affordable housing with nothing but a couple pieces of paper with great big holes in them to bind the project to the public interest. For heavens sake. Do not be so
ridiculously retentive. It is 2010. Anybody posting on line has the expectation that their contribution will be instantly shared with the rest of the on-line world the second that they hit submit. The fact that I have made this type of comment before, but others still feel they have to control (read smother) the exchange of ideas speaks volumes. Get over it you guys, it's not that important. This sort of thing flies in the face - makes a mockery - of statements like the one our Mayor Pro Tem recently made. The City Manager does NOT understand his role in citizen organized democracy. This covetous approach to soliciting input from the public underscores the lack of sincerity associated with doing it. "Mine, mine, mine, mine, mine" City staff says as they refuse to allow any one access to what their neighbor might be thinking. Orwellian. Of course, Mr. Atteberry seems to have a little trouble letting go of that budget as well. Much better to present it in a way that only a soduko lover could appreciate. Just try and reconstitute the general fund appropriations in their entirety. Ha! I knew you couldn't do it! But just to be on the safe side, let's make sure Council hasn't any sort of process or tools available to form consensus around possible amendments. Maybe just maybe, the City could host an event without Staff giving a long winded speech to start things off. The main purpose of blowing words for half an hour in such an environment is to assert control - not inform the participants. It would be an extraordinary show of understanding if this were to happen in October. Put the citizens first. Otherwise, the conclusion will be, as is the case with this silly on-line form, that the appearance of collecting public input is far more important than actually doing anything with it. "If local government and public works wasn't about the triple bottom line for the last 150 years, what was the operational paradigm?" The exchange of ideas is 100 times more important that the collection of ideas. I'm not saying that it is without its downsides, but it is vastly superior to the control freak approach to civic engagement. But most of all: 1) always make sure you have enough thought leaders in the room 2) wipe out all the mosquitoes and drill a hole to the center of the Earth.
City of Fort Collins, Colorado

As the City moves forward, redevelopment will become an important aspect of our economic health. What are the best ways to encourage high quality redevelopment and where are some important areas to focus these efforts? (See examples below.)

- City coordination and assistance to address infrastructure deficiencies (like transportation improvements and regional stormwater basins).
- Assortment of incentives to encourage redevelopment along College Avenue in the midtown area (between Prospect and Harmony).

Share your ideas!

Terence Hoaglund

Keep in mind, that no one project can solve all the deficiencies in the existing infrastructure.

Anne Burruss Schreck

I live about 4 blocks off College and something will have to be done about the train noise to encourage more development there. I have never been anywhere else where they feel the need to make so much noise.

And I agree with Terence that it can't just be one thing done. Stormwater, transportation, complimentary land uses and architectural controls are all important aspects. You also cannot focus on College to the exclusion of the remainder of the City.

Katie Wallace

Offer a variety of incenctives to inspire people to fill in and redevelop downtown and other community hubs.

Visit cities like Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and moderate sized towns in their vicinity. Come back with photos to inspire Fort Collins residents of what is possible. (I just returned from a trip to Holland where 95-year-olds are riding their bicycles to the grocery store and people are transporting 3 or more children on one bicycle, or delivering books, food, etc. on delivery bikes!) Seeing the majority of the population moving themselves around and having fun with it was so inspiring. When I am 95 years old, I hope to live in a town whose infrastructure allows me the freedom to walk or bike to the store or a social function. As my friend said, every City Planner should be required to visit the Netherlands.

Emily Elmore

I think North Fort Collins, the many abandoned buildings along Jefferson, and downtown, Link Lane and the Industrial zone as well as the Foothills Mall. I think RE-development is key, and if Planning & Development can offer benefits, lessen fees, expedite the Development review process for Developers, and serve as a partner somehow on those projects, I think you will have more people seeing the potential... at least the ones who don't already see this. Is there a way to almost penalize tearing old buildings down... take the Armadillo, and the old farm-stead in that parking lot... if the Developer tears that down, is there a way for the City to make it more cost-effective for them to re-use those old buildings than to demolish them?

I also agree that having visuals can really help. Maybe having contests for Architects, or interested community members to create schematics, of the possibilities would be a fun way to cast vision for a walkable in-fill focused future. Any pictures of European Cities would help! I think the key is to think long term for what many generations from now will need... it'd be great for that kind of thinking to be the norm. And, development seems to really be all about timing, hopefully it doesn't all happen too much too soon... It seems the best thing we can do is incentivize in-fill and regulate green field development as much as possible.

Thanks for asking the questions!