Plan Fort Collins Question of the Week:
Q6 - Neighborhoods

One of our long-term goals is to maintain the character of Fort Collins’ many distinct neighborhoods, while still allowing appropriate change. What are some ways to do this?

Responses submitted via Online Comment Form:

Answer: Were there previous weekly questions that dealt with transportation? More specifically bicycle access? I live in a neighborhood in the northeast part of town (neighborhood is around the intersection of Westview Road and Cottonwood Drive, northeast part of the City along County Club Road) that has extremely poor bicycle lane access to get into the Old Town area. More specifically, Country Club Road has no bike lane and quite a few people (including children on their way to Tavelli School) use that to get to Lemay to then head south into town. North College is also a disaster re: bicycle safety and access to Old Town. Can this be included in the planning? This area of town is very close to Old Town but the bicycle lanes other than Lemay are unsafe.

Answer: (a) don’t be too restrictive on remodeling and new construction in the Old Town neighborhoods. Some restrictions on "style that fits in" might be reasonable, but don’t object to newer homes just because they are bigger or removed an older home (not all the old homes in OT are gems). Most of the redevelopment I’ve seen so far in OT and nearby (including rebuilds) is already doing a great job keeping with the style of the neighborhood, even strengthening the style of the ‘hoods. (BTW, the newer homes are likely more energy efficient and may use less energy despite being bigger. The larger homes also promote greater housing density and different demographics. For example, families instead of just CSU students.). Remodels and development in OT neighborhoods likely keep these areas energized and only strengthens these areas.

(b) keep neighborhood schools open! PSD is considering closing two elementary schools and one middle school all in NW Fort Collins. The closures will disproportionately hit these neighborhoods. NW residents will be driving their children to other neighborhoods. (yes, >40% already do, but do we want that to be 100%?) (c) good transit (bus routes, bike lanes) seems to enhance all neighborhoods, especially when combined with mixed-use neighborhoods (less driving across town to other ‘hoods). (d) over time, make sure the older neighborhoods have modern streets/walks too. (e) stop facilitating development on the edge of town. (yes, the city lobbied for this and I think provided TIF financing?). Did we gain new retail in SE FC, or just have it move from College to SE FC? Thanks for the chance for input.
Answer: I hate that my HOA can tell me I can't put a 8x6 shed in my yard to store my lawnmower in.

Answer: I agree with strengthening standards to ensure neighborhood compatibility and also to create amenities as described in your message. I also think it important to strengthen control over landlords; irresponsible landlords impact both tenants and neighbors.

Answer:
- Strengthen or relax regulations for ensuring compatibility of additions and new construction. This is a very controversial topic. I have not been attending the East side West side open houses and don't feel I have enough background or have educated myself enough to answer the question. Personally I own a home in oldtown and would like the ability to remodel it to my liking. My liking however is to bring it to the era it was built. I find a lot of the homes that are going up around oldtown to be well thought out in design and attractive. Again, I would need to educate myself more from all the work City Staff is doing on this subject to have a fully thought out answer.

- Accommodating housing for different types of households I support this. Mix of elder housing, multi family, single family, low income, wealthy etc..

- Adding neighborhood amenities such as medians, landscaping, gardens, and multi-use stormwater detention ponds I am all for quality over quantity. I support providing quality public spaces (streets and street scape are our most prevental public spaces). This encourages people to be out enjoying their neighborhoods and neighbors. Community Garden areas partnered with schools during the summer, multi-use stormwater detention ponds with trails and dog parks (people aren't going to be out in the rain in these areas), landscaped medians and landscaped bulbouts. Art on the corners similar to near Remington and Elizabeth area (not sure exactly which intersection)

- Your ideas? Create mini Oak street plazas at each arterial/arterial intersection. This would encourage more neighborhood activity. Walking/riding to the commercial areas from 0.5 miles max away. Making excuses to walk the dog to these areas to get a cup of coffee. Create vibrant local neighborhood nodes.

Answer: It's interesting that your examples above appear to be newer (and in my opinion devoid of character) subdivisions. These kinds of neighborhoods usually have restrictive covenants that ensure the uniformity of houses and yards etc. But, the city's older neighborhoods certainly need some kind of regulations (or perhaps strengthening existing regulations) to ensure that they don't gradually transform into the same bland, cheaply constructed houses being built in the outer areas. The first thing the city needs to do is reign in the Zoning Board of Appeals. The most egregious examples of incompatible development in the Old Town area have all clearly been granted variances for building size and/or percentage of the lot covered by buildings. This has got to stop. I've been getting the agendas and minutes for the last year and this Board almost always approves these requests. These existing standards are clearly intended to maintain neighborhood character – they just need to be enforced! Another threat to neighborhood is the approval of requests for additional permitted uses in residential neighborhoods. It is utterly inappropriate to grant these changes at the expense of homeowners who purchased residential property under the expectation that the zoning would be maintained. Allowing commercial uses to creep into family neighborhoods will ultimately destroy them. Finally, the behavior of certain neighborhood residents can also detract from neighborhood quality. The city must continue to enforce existing codes, including the Occupancy Ordinance, in order to ensure that neighborhoods (especially those near CSU) are livable for professionals and families. I urge the city to strengthen the office of Neighborhood Services as the work of this office is vital to maintaining our quality of life.
**Answer:** I'd like to step outside the question for a minute, and suggest that we have a problem in that much of Fort Collins looks very generic. A problem is that our neighborhoods are not very unique, and the city is full of housing developments that could be anywhere in the country. To address the question, for a reason I don’t understand (city code?) Home Owners Associations are very strong here. Belonging to an HOA in many parts of the city is mandatory, and the HOAs typically have rules that force homogenization. The first thing I would do is restrict the powers and time extent that an HOA can enforce development rules. Second I'd encourage more mixed density development. I wish we had small commercial areas mixed in with our neighborhoods. Local restaurants, pubs, or small shops are great ways for neighborhoods to create individual flavor. See Portland, OR, for some good examples of this. Third, I’d love to see some more landscaping of streets into traffic calming features that encourage neighborhood connections across streets, as well as more biking and walking. Finally, I think it would be good to have mixed density development in a neighborhood. Big houses and small houses, plus apartments, would all be nice. But we need to watch out for absentee landlords. Much of the student rental housing is not maintained well.

**Answer:** Keep neighborhood schools: Poudre School District is considering the closure of 4 elementary schools and 1 middle school. 3 of these 5 are all in northwest Fort Collins (Irish, Putnam, and Lincoln). All 5 of these are in neighborhoods that might be characterized as "older" neighborhoods. Considering that north Fort Collins is starting to see some growth, it seems short sighted to remove neighborhood schools from this part of town. Other food for thought: There are countless examples in this country of cities growing outward and leaving behind a depressed core. It takes good planning and effort to keep the core of cities vibrant, and neighborhood schools are part of that effort.

**Answer:** Although it's important to preserve neighborhoods, I believe we should also enhance neighborhoods. One thing I would like to see are walkable retail districts that can provide local services to the neighborhoods. Wouldn't it be great to walk to the barber, coffee shop, pub? We think these things only work in Old Town, but I feel many neighborhoods can benefit from them if they are located where they have enough neighbors and traffic to support them. How about new bicycle and ped connections along ditches and where cul-de-sacs exist now? Places people can walk or bike. We could even retrofit older collector streets by adding tree lawns. I think we can preserve existing neighborhoods while allowing homeowner's to maintain property rights. Allowing greater use of accessory units can provide for extended families or small rental units.

**Answer:** There should be neighborhood signs to mark the neighborhoods. These can say something about the neighborhood or have a distinct style or design to represent the neighborhood. Old Town and City Park are really the only neighborhoods that have much distinct character. You could have design guidelines so that new development had to conform to the character, like making them traditional style, victorian, craftsman. Restrict building heights because it’s so flat, tall buildings would stick out like sore thumbs. Mainly just work on making more traditional neighborhoods. Really rather than keeping the existing character we need to get more walkable neighborhoods with commercial (NOT strip malls) that provide services. That is what is most lacking. In some cases to maintain character maybe it could be a rezone so that people could operate commercial out of houses instead of having to build a mini village center.

**Answer:** We like the idea of neighborhood signs (not subdivision signs) to identify various areas of the city. Presently we are aware of the 'City Park' neighborhood sign.(but it is just a sign on a pole.) Maybe there are others around the city that we haven't seen. In Kirkland, WA various neighborhoods are identified by very attractive, permanent signs.(not just pole-signs)
They provide not only an identification of a neighborhood, but we think they build a sense of pride in the neighborhood to all who live there.

**Answer:** I don’t feel like there are really that many distinct neighborhoods now, other than Old Town and City Park. Definitely work to preserve the character of those: emphasize/incentivize preservation of the historic homes, keep new development consistent with the historic character. Is this officially a historic district of any kind? Maybe look into that. There might be funding associated with it. If you want to maintain the character of some of the more sprawl/subdivision neighborhoods I guess you could have design guidelines to keep new development in the same style and scale, but perhaps you would build houses that look single family but are actually duplexes/condos. This would keep the visual character but allow for more density of housing. In the older neighborhoods you could convert some of the bigger houses into apartments or have new development stay in a Victorian or historic style, but be designed as a larger “house” split into multiple units. All neighborhoods should be walkable. All should have bike lanes and sidewalks, preferably with a hard curb and ideally with a planter strip buffering the sidewalk from the road. Neighborhood amenities such as medians, landscaping, gardens, and multi-use stormwater detention ponds are highly desirable. Cul-de-Sac neighborhoods could have trails/greenways that could connect people (walking or biking) to other parts of the neighborhood. Cul-de-Sacs are notorious for creating traffic bottleneck situations elsewhere along the roadways (where they feed into arterials), so having an alternative route for ped/bike access would be helpful. Also, Cul-de-Sacs create long, circuitous routes to places that would be extremely close as the crow flies (a school 400 yards behind someone’s house could require a half-mile drive through snaky streets in the opposite direction before they can circle around and get there). These types of trail connections would make for more efficient, direct routes of access. All neighborhoods should have a neighborhood center for people to join in community activities (park, plaza, and/or community center) and live their lives (commercial center focusing on local businesses). Think “Cheers.” We want to go where everybody knows our name. If you want to keep the existing character of neighborhoods but still create this type of place, you could designate an area and change the zoning so people could create shops, restaurants, etc. out of houses (the 12th South neighborhood of Nashville does this well). You could also capitalize on an existing park, or maybe one of the schools they are talking about closing could become a community center. Those usually have parks attached anyway. Then the houses closest to that area would be able to be converted to commercial businesses, or you could infill the parking lot or even use some of the space of the existing building to house businesses, artist studios, or some other kind of uses that would ben fit the neighborhood. Down with Strip Malls! If you are rethinking a strip mall area as a neighborhood center, redesign it to front stores on the sidewalk and create some open space for outdoor seating and gathering. There can still be a parking lot behind, but it will feel much more like a Main Street downtown, and will attract pedestrians and cyclists. Also incentivize having local businesses instead of chains. If people want chains, they can go to the mall.

**Answer:** Neighborhoods can best be maintained by first having strong enforcement of municipal ordinances addressing quality of life. Citizens following such ordinances feel disempowered when they see neighbors disregarding such ordinances with impunity. These ordinances have been passed by Councils as the voice of the people and should be vigorously enforced by the City staff. However there should always be an ongoing discussion about the future of neighborhoods. This should engage citizens in a lively public debate. Such should be the case regarding changes such as additions and new construction. One of the issues that needs serious attention is housing of students. The city does not have enough housing addressing the unique needs of students and that should be addressed by promoting development that addresses such needs. We are presently in a situation where students are
housed in too great numbers in neighborhoods designed for single families. One result is that such housing that could serve as affordable housing for families is unavailable. And a result is tension, confrontation and disruption of such neighborhoods to no resident’s advantage. While the changing nature of households should be constantly revisited, there is no place for boarding house type households in low density zones. Zoning laws must be respected. As to amenities, look to the public spaces in neighborhoods as ways to enhance neighborhood quality of life. Some connector streets are too wide and encourage speeding. Add traffic calming through creating medians for on site stormwater detention, enhanced bike and pedestrian routes carved out of these too wide streets. Consider using stormwater detention ponds as neighborhood gardens since these spaces go largely unused even for their intended use. Or add picnic tables and landscaping to such areas to create neighborhood public gathering places for play and conversation in order to bring neighbors into face to face contact and counter the isolation that is currently fostered by our lack of front porches and garages with remote openers.

Answer: Protect Neighborhood Schools. We are seeing a lot of potential damaging affects towards neighborhood schools, especially in the northwest portion of Fort Collins where there is a very unique population. We need to support the unique schools in the Northwest area of town, especially as this area sees a resurgence - many new homes/neighborhoods being built. It would be such a shame if northwest neighborhood schools closed and we had to drive our kids across town when there is already great, very successful schools within walking distance. It is such a gift to have precious transition time with my child on the way to and from school. We meet up with many other parents along the walk as well as connecting with other neighbors close to the school.

Answer: Hold public meetings for each neighborhood. Let the people who live in the neighborhoods decide how best to protect the character of the neighborhood. Work closely with the Homeowner Associations too.

Answer: Implement design standards in neighborhoods considering the history and aesthetics of the neighborhood. Utilize brick, stone, river rock and other natural materials. Requiring these materials scales down the size of the buildings to pedestrian and bike traffic. Further these materials will ensure durability and fire safety.
City of Fort Collins, Colorado One of our long-term goals is to maintain the character of Fort Collins’ many distinct neighborhoods, while still allowing appropriate change. What are some ways to do this?
- Strengthen or relax regulations for ensuring compatibility of additions and new construction?
- Accommodating housing for different types of households?
- Adding neighborhood amenities such as medians, landscaping, gardens, and multi-use stormwater detention ponds?

What do you think?

Karen Veio Let the HOA's determine compatibility in those neighborhoods which have them. Don't make it anymore difficult than it is now for a homeowner to improve his residence. You might provide suggestions on how to make it simpler to add a garage or addition, or a deck or patio, or other improvement.

Most neighborhoods already accommodate a diversity of households. Changing zoning or land use codes can irritate some folks and please others. Even Granny-flats aren't popular ideas with everyone. Ask the residents what they would vote for or against & plan modifications accordingly.

Anything you do with the City-owned property could certainly be benificial to a neighborhood with exception of Medians which can complicate turning...increase speeds, and add more hardscape rather than softscape. Medians have their place but you will get far more praise from the neighbors if you can add landscaped areas, parks, trails, ponds, and bikeways.

Karen Veio Meg: The corner lot house lot is usually ALWAYS LARGER than the interior lots...but the building setbacks on corner lots limits the size of the home that can be built. The City restricts the building footprint as to what will be allowed to be built on a corner lot (or any other lot). Homes aren't being overbuilt...they just may have more new square footage than what you are using as a reference. New home owners who can afford to build with what appears to be more square footage INCREASE the value of all the homes on the block. They are in fact "improving the quality of the neighborhood." These new homes on corner lots also add to the newer, more expensive look of the block which helps the street scene look newer & more up to date...all factors which add to the overall appeal of the neighborhood at no cost to you or to the City.

Meg Dunn karen: the house on the northeast corner of mountain and grant may improve my house value, but it's an eye sore all the same and when we were looking for a new house to move into we deliberately did not even look at the house next door to it when it was for sale because that behemoth is horrendous. I would never want to live next to something like that. I know the rules for enlarging an old town home in this area because we ended up remodeling instead of buying and that house definitely does not fit the rules.
I have serious questions about several other corner houses as well. In fact, I have been to city meetings where corner houses asked to expand past the allowed amounts and they were granted every time I saw it brought up. The same was not true when inside houses asked to expand past the allowed amounts. (Although the house on loomis just north of mountain might be an exception. That's another eyesore. Houses like that definitely impact the feel and texture of a neighborhood.)

**Alexis Zanetich Soffler** Protect neighborhood schools. If you want to retain neighborhood “feel” (beyond architecture), neighborhood schools are a place where a community will draw its emotional resources. It keeps neighbors in contact with each other, as their children are connected as they all go to the same school. Children walking to school saves buses and also creates camaraderie in the neighborhood when you meet the children and their parents walking by every day. Parks as well. By keeping neighborhood parks in great shape, it also draws families who get to know each other. It goes from a bunch of houses next to each other to an actual community! Schools and parks are meeting places. They are vital to communities.

I totally “get” all the architecture, real estate, and zoning stuff, but what is at the heart of the communities are the people. And for neighborhoods to really exist, people have to know the other people on their blocks and around the neighborhood. They have to wave and chat about the weather. They have to swap stories about toddler food tips at the park. They have to know the other kids in their child’s class. They have to know the elderly folks next door in order to shovel their sidewalk in winter. We certainly don’t live in a “fancy” part of town, but I know all the families on my block and family from “back east” always marvel about how you can't walk outside without saying hello to someone, how the sidewalk is filled with hop scotch chalk and bikes on lawns, kids selling lemonade, the smell of grass, the ice cream truck tinkling by, etc. "It's just too perfect!" they say. And, it's not about house square footage. It's about authentic human connection.

In all this, don't forget the people!

**Meg Dunn** I agree, Alexis! I love, love, love our neighborhood schools. And we definitely need to be supporting them, especially the schools in older buildings that often serve lower income families in settings where the buildings and the things inside them are coming to the end of their natural life cycle and need to be replaced. I know there are huge budget shortfalls in the district, but as a community we need to be not only voting in favor of our local schools, but also volunteering in them or getting involved in other ways.

I never feel more connected to my immediate neighborhood than when I'm walking with my children to school and all of these disparate families start to coalesce into one large community of people with the same goal in mind. It's a few minutes, every day, of really feeling connected.

**Richard Duveneck** I believe current zoning regulations are adequate, but obviously Old Town is a mix of old and new architecture (and attitudes) so extra attention needs to be paid to new and remodel architecture to prevent conflict. A solid set of architectural rules that all new construction or remodels must follow is imperative to increase property values. This will provide an incentive to attract a new and larger tax base which we need to improve our local schools and provide the amenities we all want in Fort Collins. It is dangerous to allow a few vocal minorities with no solutions to offer derail progress. We need reasonable architectural guidelines that are clear, concise, and agreed upon prior to construction that will help reduce uncertainty that new investors in the old neighborhoods would face. Maybe each neighborhood in the city could have an assigned set of architectural guidelines for architectural styles that are acceptable for that neighborhood. There are some neighborhoods in Old Town that badly need updating, so priority should be given to these neighborhoods that currently have little or no architectural appeal. As property owners, I think we all basically know what is appealing, and what is not. Having a set of guidelines published will go a long way to provide a future vision for these less desirable neighborhoods for developers and homeowners to strive for.

**Penelope Gilliland** I completely echo Alexis Soffler's comment on neighborhood schools.

We are seeing a lot of potential damaging affects towards neighborhood schools, especially in the northwest portion of Fort Collins where there is a very unique population.

We need to support the unique schools in the Northwest area of town, especially as this area sees a resurgence - many new homes/neighborhoods being built.

It would be such a shame if northwest neighborhood schools closed and we had to drive our kids across town when there is already great, very successful schools within walking distance.

**Meg Dunn** To Penelope's point, from what I've heard, Lincoln Middle School is the ONLY middle school with increasing enrollment over the past 3 years. It's not the furthest
northwestern middle school, but it's one of them and it's doing quite well. Between 2007-
2010 their enrollment has increased by 33%.

Antonette Aragon Neighborhood schools are extremely important to Fort Collins. When
people feel connected to their neighborhood because their children are attending schools
close to their homes, they experience community as Alexa eloquently shared above. 70% of
the parents in FOCO choose to send their children to neighborhood schools. 30% of
parents choose out of their neighborhoods and choose another school. I believe a strength
to the overall community of this city is to maintain neighborhood schools and minimize
school of choice, which is based upon a business model (see Diane Ravitch's book, "The
Death and Life of the Great American School System").

Antonette Aragon Furthermore, I echo the sentiments of Penelope Gilliland in support
of Irish, Putnam and Lincoln Middle schools. These neighborhood schools are offering
premiere education to northern FOCO. The community built around these schools is
incredible and should be hailed as true multiculturalism at work. When communities
provide room for ethnic diversity to flourish, we should do everything to foster this in our
ever changing global society.
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<td>Alexis Zanetich Soffler</td>
<td>Protect neighborhood schools.</td>
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<td>Richard Keller</td>
<td>I agree. We are in a feeder school right now that has 800-900 students and a ratio of 20:1 for some classes. Keep as many neighborhood schools as possible.</td>
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<td>Frank Strongoli III</td>
<td>Maybe something like you have in Old Town. All new buildings and remodels have to be approved so that the architecture fits the area. Anything beyond that is HOA territory.</td>
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