

Project Development Plan - Community Horticulture Center

Statement of Planning Objectives

11/9/00

1. Applicable City Plan Principles and Policies

- a. LU-1.1: Compact urban growth.
The project is centrally located in Fort Collins, within an infill area, and contiguous with existing vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic routes.
- b. CAD-2.1: Functional, attractive, safe, and comfortable civic buildings and grounds.
As a civic facility, the Community Horticulture Center (CHC) will be located in a central and highly visible location. The architectural quality of the building and grounds will express permanence and importance. A primary objective for the design and the programming of the CHC will be to reflect and interpret our local heritage, and through that create a sense of community identity. The project will be adjacent to the existing Spring Creek bike trail, and within easy walking distance of the Mason Street Transit Corridor. The safety and comfort of our visitors will be strongly addressed.
- c. CAD-5.2: Education and awareness of our local heritage.
Throughout our design and the development of our programming, we will be looking for opportunities to create a local "sense of place", and to educate our visitors about Fort Collins history, particularly related to horticulture (for example, sour cherry orchards and lilacs), agriculture (such as with irrigation ditches), climate, and soils.
- d. CAD-6.2: Cultural development and participation.
In addition to serving as a recreational and educational facility, the CHC will also provide cultural services as a venue for art shows, small concerts, and other art-related programs.
- e. ENV-2: Protect environmental resources.
The foremost mission of the CHC will be to demonstrate sustainable horticulture, including water-conserving landscaping, backyard wildlife habitat, use of native plants, "organic" gardening techniques, composting, and alternatives to fossil fuel requiring maintenance practices.
- f. ENV-4: Encouraging energy efficiency and use of renewable energy.
The CHC building will be a state-of-the-art facility demonstrating the use of solar energy, energy efficiency and "green" construction. It will serve as a public demonstration site with educational programming to extend its impact.
- g. ENV-5.1: Protection and enhancement of ecosystems.
The restoration of 5 acres of the Spring Creek corridor will be a major element of our site development. It will include extensive re-grading of the area to approximate a

more naturalistic cross-section, wetlands will be added, and the entire area will be replanted with appropriate native plants.

- h. ENV-7.3: Minimize flood damage.
The site grading will result in the creation of an additional ~20 acre feet of stormwater detention along Spring Creek, a high priority of the city's Stormwater Utility.
- I. ENV-7.5: Flood education.
One element of our programming will be the interpretation of the Spring Creek 1997 flood, and associated education.
- j. ENV-7.6: Educational programs on stormwater quality.
The proposed development includes a boardwalk path along Spring Creek and over the created wetlands, to serve as an outdoor laboratory for environmental education.
- k. NOL-1.3: Public opportunities for educational and recreational opportunities related to natural features.
This project will create numerous opportunities to learn about and enjoy Spring Creek.
- l. NOL-3: Balancing opportunities for passive and active recreation within city's parks and natural areas.
This project will provide the opportunity for both active (athletic and play activities in the neighborhood park, and participatory gardening at the CHC) and passive (strolling the grounds, relaxing on a bench, listening to a concert, etc.) recreation.
- m. GM-4.1: City commitment to providing capital facilities.
As one of the projects in the Building Community Choices capital improvement plan, the CHC will help meet the needs and desires of our growing community.
- n. RD-5.2: Neighborhood parks in residential districts.
This project includes the development of a several acre neighborhood park, within easy walking and biking distance of the residential areas to the west. It will have an unprogrammed multi-use turf area, a picnic shelter, benches, and gardens.
- o. ED-1: Appropriate development within an Employment District.
The CHC and neighborhood park represent an appropriate addition to this Employment District, as it will provide recreational/educational/cultural opportunities, it will have an attractive appearance, and will be designed to encourage bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access.

- p. WC-1.1 and 1.2: Functions of water corridors and protection of natural resources. This development will not only preserve, but it will enhance, the functions of Spring Creek for drainage (floodwater detention will be increased), recreation, habitat conservation, and wildlife movement.
- q. WC-2.1: Appropriate placement of recreational trails. This development includes the re-routing of the Spring Creek bike trail along the creek, in a manner that minimizes habitat impact and maximizes human enjoyment.
- r. WC-2.3: Connections between water corridors, open lands, and trails. The restoration of Spring Creek through our site will serve as a critical component of the entire Spring Creek corridor, hopefully inspiring further restoration along its length. The bike trail along the corridor and through our site provides a great opportunity for people to experience the beauty of this area.

2. Description of proposed open space, buffering, landscaping, circulation, transition areas, wetlands and natural areas on site and in the general vicinity of the project:

Ecologists assessing the Spring Creek corridor through our site have determined that it currently has little natural resource value in the way of native vegetation or wildlife. The water course is lined with one large cottonwood, several non-native crack willows, and about a dozen invasive Russian olives. The adjacent fields have been leveled right up to the banks, for the purpose of flood irrigation, and are vegetated primarily with alfalfa, weeds, and non-native grasses. This corridor does, however, have great potential for restoration. In order to improve the natural resource value and to create much-needed floodwater detention, our proposed grading includes extensive pulling back of the top several feet of the existing banks (leaving the existing channel and bottom 2 feet of embankment as is) to create a more naturalistic two-year floodplain with meandering high water channels and wetland areas within it.

The existing trees within the corridor will be preserved, other than the Russian olives and the smaller crack willow (*Salix fragilis*). The corridor will be replanted extensively with appropriate wetland, riparian, and upland native plants, including trees, shrubs, forbs, sedges, rushes, and grasses. This area of native plantings will be for the entire 100 feet width of the CHC property on the north side of the creek. On the south side, the native plantings will vary between 60 feet (for a portion of the neighborhood park area) and 200 feet (in the area of the Habitat Garden), with an average of over 100 feet. These plantings will consist of native trees, shrubs, forbs, and unmowed grasses. A portion of the south side of the corridor will be accessible by an informal path and boardwalks for the purpose of environmental education. Interpretive signage in this area will be kept to a minimum. The restoration work will be done with the assistance of riparian naturalists and restoration hydrologists. This area will be maintained with a naturalistic approach, with an example being that the grasses will not be mowed. The bike trail will be located

on the south side of Spring Creek with a meandering route that varies between 60 and 130 feet from the creek.

Section 3.4.1D of the Land Use Code deals with natural feature buffer zones, and subsection (2) states that “no disturbance shall occur within any buffer zone...except as provided in subsection (c).” Subsection (c) states that “the decision maker may allow disturbance or construction activity within the buffer zone for the following limited purposes:”, and goes on to list six situations. We feel that our proposed development meets the second and fourth situations due to the environmental improvements to this previously disturbed area and due to the creation of stormwater detention as a “utility installation”. The second and fourth exceptions read as follows: “2. restoration of previously disturbed or degraded areas or planned enhancement projects to benefit the natural area or feature” and “4. utility installations when such activities and installations cannot reasonably be located outside the buffer zone or other nearby areas of development”.

We have met with the Natural Resources staff on several occasions over the past 6 months, and have received their tentative approval of this concept. The Natural Resources staff has also tentatively determined that it will provide financial assistance to this project, to be used for the restoration of the Spring Creek corridor. We have also given presentations to the natural areas committee of the Natural Resources Advisory Board and the full Natural Resources Advisory Board. The committee and the full board were supportive of the project as a whole, and with our proposed development along Spring Creek, with the proviso that several specific concerns be addressed. The proposed development indicated in this Project Development Plan submittal does address those concerns.

3. Statement of proposed ownership and maintenance of public and private open space areas:

The Community Horticulture Center and the neighborhood park will be owned and maintained by the City of Fort Collins. No future change is foreseen in the ownership and maintenance.

4. Estimate of number of employees:

The Community Horticulture Center will initially be staffed with four full-time, several part-time employees, and possibly an intern. We will also rely heavily on the assistance of volunteers for the operation and maintenance of the facility and grounds. At any point in time, this could vary between no volunteers and 10 or 15 volunteers.

As additional gardens are built and more maintenance is required, the number of paid staff will increase. When the project is completed, we estimate that there would be ten full-time and part-time staff during the growing season.

- 5. Description of rationale behind the assumptions and choices made by the applicant:**
The only design-related decision that might not be self-evident, and that varies from what might be expected by City staff or directed by City Plan, has to do with the location of our parking lot. The parking lot was originally proposed to be in the southwestern corner of our site due to our believing that, with the information we had at that time, that location was the most cost-effective, the most practical in terms of site layout and flow, the safest for traffic, the least impact to flood detention volumes, and the most consistent with City Plan objectives. However, as described in #8 below, the Windtrail neighborhood to the west of our site was strongly opposed to that location, for several reasons.

As a result of that vocal resistance, we re-assessed our options for the parking lot location, including a further contact with Eric Bracke, City traffic engineer. Because of the circumstances, he stated that he would allow our parking lot access to be directly across from the Natural Resources Research Center's north entrance, rather than the previously stipulated 315 feet north of that entrance. This allowed us to avoid a very large amount of filling within the floodway, thereby eliminating a major disadvantage (and possible "fatal flaw") of the previous design for this parking lot location. Allowing the parking lot access at this point also eliminated other drawbacks previously identified with locating the parking lot along Centre Avenue, and even created some additional benefits, most notably allowing us to have a staff parking lot and service access on the "back side" of our building. This was a feature that was not possible with the parking lot as previously considered.

In re-assessing the pros and cons of the two options and in wanting to meet the neighborhood's request, we determined that the location alongside Centre Avenue was best. Therefore, that is what we are now proposing, as seen in our attached plans. This is in a more visible location than what might be preferred by City Plan. However, this best meets the concerns of the neighborhood, and has received their strong support (see attached). It also, we feel, results in a better overall project for the community. The view of the parking lot from Centre Avenue will be mitigated as much as possible with screening from trees and shrubs.

- 6. Evidence of successful completion of the applicable criteria:**
Not applicable
- 7. Narrative description of how conflicts between land uses or disturbances to wetlands or natural areas are being avoided or mitigated:**
The net effect of our project will be a greater amount and improved quality of wildlife habitat on our site, as compared with its current condition. However, before it can be improved with a vast amount of replanting, we will have to do a considerable amount of earthwork that will be initially disruptive. With all of this earthwork, we will need to provide appropriate measures to protect Spring Creek, certain trees, and any existing

animal shelters/habitat that are deemed important, such as fox dens. Protective measures will include: construction documents that clearly and explicitly state areas requiring special care (with stiff penalties for violation); orange plastic fencing to protect trees to be saved and any important animal habitat areas; silt fencing along the border of Spring Creek; and close construction observation/supervision.

8. Narrative addressing each concern/issue raised at the neighborhood meetings:

During the course of our extensive public outreach, strong support was expressed for the project as a whole and for having it located on the intended site. There was not a single opinion expressed against the project itself or our location. During the five neighborhood meetings and about a dozen phone conversations and E-mails, however, about 26 people expressed some concern (ranging from mild to strong) about a particular aspect(s) of our proposed development. The following narrative relates the nature of those concerns and how we have addressed them.

One minor concern expressed by one individual had to do with the proposed location of our compost bins. He was concerned that the compost would result in offensive odors that could be smelled from his residence. This concern was addressed by moving the compost bin location about 100 feet further away (so that it is now at least 300 feet from his property), in addition to assuring him that a well-tended compost bin produces very little odor, certainly nothing that could be detected from that distance. We also encouraged him to contact us in the future if he was able to smell it, and convinced him that we would then take further corrective actions.

Beyond that minor concern, all other concerns that were expressed boiled down to two issues, one regarding the initially-proposed location of the parking lot and the second regarding our serving as a venue for concerts or wedding receptions. Between these two issues the most concern, both in terms of number of people and strength of opposition, was regarding the parking lot. The parking lot was originally proposed to be in the southwest corner of our site due to our believing that location was the most cost-effective, the most practical in terms of site layout and flow, the safest for traffic, the least impactful to flood detention volumes, and the most consistent with City Plan objectives. The specific concern(s) about the parking lot varied between people, but in all cases it was some combination of: excessive noise, visual unsightliness, annoying lighting, harmful traffic exhaust, and safety risk for the neighborhood children. They all expressed that the parking lot should be located along Centre Avenue, rather than along our southwest corner. We felt that many of their concerns were based at least somewhat on inaccurate assumptions (for example, we are not proposing that the parking lot lights be on after 10:00 p.m.) and that we could mitigate some of the issues (such as with a sound wall and trees for visual and sound buffer), but our justifications and proposed mitigations were not adequate to satisfy their concerns. We therefore re-assessed our options, the result of which is now proposing that the parking lot be located along Centre Avenue, as requested by the neighbors. They are happy with this decision (see attached letter), and we and the neighbors consider that issue resolved.

The second issue of concern, as expressed by about 12 people, has to do with our proposed use of our site as a venue for small concerts, wedding receptions, special events, etc. In order to provide a highly-demanded service to the community, and to provide some earned revenue for our facility, we would like to be able to rent out our meeting room, the adjoining patio area, and the Great Lawn (see our Landscape Plan) for these type of events. Associated with these events, there would be live music or amplified recorded music, and possibly the serving of alcohol. These people's specific concerns related to these events were/are: (1) noise, (2) spillover parking in their neighborhood, and (3) drunken behavior from alcohol served at the events.

The first order of addressing these concerns has been with clarification. Many of the people expressing concern have had an inaccurate perception that we are proposing very loud concerts with a thousand or more people, similar to the CSU Lagoon Concert Series. In fact, we are envisioning much more subdued music and much smaller audiences, comparable to the Lincoln Center's summer "Nooner" series with minimally amplified music and about 300 people attending.

Controlling the number of people attending is a key issue, as that relates to both the noise level and the risk of people not finding convenient parking and resorting to looking for it in the adjoining neighborhood. We can control the number of attendees in several ways, including through strict limitations in our contracts with the groups that rent our facility, through limiting the number of tickets sold, and through the fact that our site will be secured with fencing and a single entrance. We will make sure ahead of time that there is adequate parking for the maximum number attending, through a combination of our parking lot, the Natural Resources Research Center parking lot across the street (we are in the process of obtaining a signed Memorandum of Understanding), and/or possibly the vacant field to the south of Rolland Moore Drive, owned by CSURF. Any remaining risk of people trying to park in the adjacent neighborhood should be eliminated by the fact that our parking lot location and entrance is now along Centre Avenue (rather than the previously-proposed parking location and entrance that were closer to the neighborhood), in addition to signage and parking enforcement, if needed.

We have recognized all along that the noise level of any event, whether from people or music, is a critical one. We also understand that the nearest homes are relatively close to the Great Lawn, and that sound travels more readily in this creek basin, for geographic and climatological reasons. To begin with, we re-oriented the gazebo/bandstand so that sound would be projected away from the residential neighborhoods to the west and northwest. Since June we have been performing tests and gathering information on this issue. We have sought the input of Rich Kopp, who enforces the city's noise ordinance, on several occasions. We also hired Balloffet and Associates to perform a very detailed scientific analysis of the existing noise levels at the site. Their opinion is that, with reasonable precautions, it will be possible to have amplified music and other activities on

the Great Lawn, that meets both the desires of attendees and the city's noise ordinance levels.

The time of day and frequency of these events is also a key issue. We have informed the neighbors that we do not intend to have any event last past 10:00 p.m., and in most cases they would not go past dusk. Events would most likely be limited to Friday and Saturdays during the summer.

The serving of alcohol is quite common for social events at botanic gardens. Alcoholic drinks are also permissible for adults attending events at the Senior Center and the Lincoln Center. Both facilities consider the option of serving alcohol to be essential for the rental market that they serve, and they report negligible problems associated with it. We do not want to short change our revenue-earning potential by limiting ourselves at the outset. We also feel that we can adequately establish, control and enforce limitations on the consumption of alcohol during events at our facility. Furthermore, if problems develop, they can be resolved, as we do not need to view any particular policy as "written in stone". That is particularly true for a public facility that is held to a higher standard and subject to citizen oversight and review.

Thus far, we have not been able to alleviate all of the concerns of the neighbors related to the holding of small concerts and other events. Our intent for the further resolution of these issues--the noise levels, time of day, frequency, number of people attending, and the serving of alcohol--is to continue researching and discussing them with the neighborhood. When we are further along in our planning, for example, we would be happy to conduct sound demonstrations for the neighbors so they will know what, exactly, we are proposing in terms of noise level. We feel that we do not have to have these programming issues firmly resolved in order to obtain approval of this project, given that none of these issues impact our physical design. Even if we thought that we would never hold a concert on the grounds, we would still intend to have the Great Lawn and gazebo/bandshell, for the benefit of other social events without amplified music. Furthermore, the construction of the Great Lawn and gazebo/bandshell is not anticipated to be part of phase one, and will likely be several years into the future, pending private fundraising. We feel that there is ample time to discuss these issues further, and a process set up for doing so, in parallel to the construction of the project so that it is not held up.

9. Current and past names of the project, as submitted for conceptual review:

This project has solely been referred to as the Community Horticulture Center, throughout its 14 year history of being envisioned and planned.