

# LAFAYETTE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## Summary of Discussion: Meeting with Property Owners October 21, 2020

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**Attendees:** Jana Easley (Interim Planning Director, City), Jeff Arthur (Public Works Director, City), Britt Palmberg (Rick Community Planning), Brian Mooney (Rick Community Planning), David Sinkey, John Cohagen, Bill Waneka, David Meyerowitz, Roger Caruso

### Summary of Process to Date:

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- Britt Palmberg and Jana Easley provided a summary of the current status of the Comprehensive Plan process. The overall Comprehensive Plan began in Spring 2019 and was originally scheduled to be completed by the middle of this year, but was delayed due to the shutdowns associated with the pandemic. RICK completed an online mapping tool to gain input concerning the Draft Framework Map for the Comprehensive Plan, and this mapping tool has been gathering comments from the community since late June. The mapping tool will remain active for the foreseeable future, and it has attracted well over 1,000 users to provide comment on the map. Importantly, the Draft Framework Map, and the definitions of components of the Map, represent the culmination of over a year's worth of community input as part of the Comprehensive Plan, but they remain in DRAFT form. Comments and input continue to be provided concerning the map, and it may change as the process moves toward conclusion. Meanwhile, the City staff has been reviewing a draft outline for the Comprehensive Plan (including a series of goals, policies, strategies, and action items) over the last few months. The initial components of the outline were reviewed by the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in February, and the consultants and the City staff have been adding more content to the outline over the spring and summer. This outline will provide the foundation for the eventual creation of the new Comprehensive Plan document, toward the end of the process.
- Jana and Britt provided an update on the schedule going forward for the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission will be holding a work session to review the draft outline for the Comprehensive Plan on October 27<sup>th</sup>. The CAC will be meeting in early November (tentatively scheduled for November 4<sup>th</sup>) to review the latest version of the outline for the Comprehensive Plan, and to review the input from the Planning Commission, as well as the input provided by property owners and the broader community concerning the Draft Framework Map. The Planning Commission and City Council will hold a joint work session (tentatively scheduled for November 23<sup>rd</sup>) to

review the input from the Planning Commission, CAC, and property owners, and the latest version of the outline for the Comprehensive Plan.

- The anticipated timeline for the remainder of the project has not been formalized, but the current thinking is that the consultant team can draw from the various input provided by the City Council, Planning Commission and CAC and work on the Comprehensive Plan document during the winter, between December and February. The City anticipates holding a final community meeting for the process in February or March (either in-person, or virtually), and the overall goal is to complete the process and formally adopt the new Comprehensive Plan by May 2021.

## **Initial Discussion of Draft Framework Map and Definitions**

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- Britt Palmberg and Brian Mooney provided an overview of the Draft Framework Map and the associated definitions of the various terms used on the map, including the definitions of land use areas. Britt and Brian emphasized that the various classifications on the map were intended to provide property owners with greater flexibility and encourage more creativity in the creation of new developments or redevelopments in the Lafayette area. For example, the “Adaptable Commercial” definition is intended to encourage creativity in the potential re-use of commercial properties that could include the integration of office and residential uses. The current map and the definitions also help provide for improvements and enhancements to mobility around the community (for all modes of travel) and emphasize the importance of open space and open space connections around Lafayette.
- The property owners expressed concern that the definitions, in their current form, may suggest the mandating of particular land uses and particular features as part of new development. The definitions are also very big picture, and this leaves a lot of ambiguity in the approval process. Will the City or community members use these definitions to provide unrealistic mandates for new developments? John Cohagen expressed concerns about the definitions, indicating that the map and the definitions do not provide enough information about the plan for a particular parcel. John is concerned about having too much flexibility in the definitions, and he is not sure that a creative project (such as a mixed use project involving a hotel and apartments) would work in the “Neighborhood Mixed Use” classification outlined for his property, near 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe. The property owners also expressed concern that the realities of the real estate market in Lafayette would not support the vision outlined in the definitions.
- The property owners suggested that additional edits to the language used in the definitions may be in order. Brian and Britt from RICK emphasized that the project team

welcomes any and all suggestions and edits for the text used in the definitions, as well as edits to the Draft Framework Map.

## Additional Comments from Property Owners

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- Bill Waneka questioned whether the symbols on the map indicated that a roundabout was proposed at 119<sup>th</sup> and Baseline. RICK confirmed that the symbol at 119<sup>th</sup> and Baseline was to designate a “focus area” in this part of town, and that a roundabout at the 119<sup>th</sup> and Baseline intersection has not been discussed during the process.
- John Cohagen indicated that traffic congestion in the area around 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe was significantly hurting the small businesses in the area. The Draft Framework Map should help address concerns about traffic congestion in this part of town. Chris Coker of the YMCA would like to be involved in the process, going forward, as well.
- The Comprehensive Plan document should outline the overall intent of how to use the definitions and the map, upfront in the document.
- The current version of the Draft Framework Map and the definitions provides for a high level of subjectivity. There is an emerging anti-growth movement throughout the Front Range, and the high level and aspirational aspect of the Comprehensive Plan could make it impossible to get any project approved. The reality is that the economics of providing the level of amenities described in the text (for gathering places, connectivity, etc.) could make it economically impossible to complete projects in the city. Many people are uninformed concerning the economic realities facing projects in the region (given the cost of land, labor, etc.) and make suggestions that could be infeasible. The danger in this process is that the Comprehensive Plan could create a setting where projects in Lafayette may “never be able to measure up” to the lofty aspirational goals and text provided in the plan and its maps.
- Louisville’s current plan and its political stance have made it very difficult for any projects to move forward in that community, and led to Medtronic giving up on a project in Louisville and choosing Lafayette instead.
- The reality is that in order to provide for the level of quality and amenities suggested in the definitions for the Comprehensive Plan, projects would need to have more density and more intensity, to make projects economically feasible. All of the costs of amenities included in developments simply mean that projects would need to have greater levels of density. We need to have a common sense approach.

- Projects may also need to have greater density and intensity in order to help provide for the diversity of housing needed in Lafayette, and to help provide for more affordable housing.

## Discussion of Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan

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- RICK noted that Comprehensive Plan documents normally outline the big picture vision of a community and its aspirational goals, and that the details of how projects get approved and what is allowed (from a technical perspective) are normally addressed in the development code. Lafayette's current development code is from 1986 and is out of date. The current code is geared to the completion of suburban-style developments from the era of the 1970s and 1980s, and is not equipped to help implement more creative and flexible development projects. One of the first implementation items, coming out of the Comprehensive Plan, should ideally include the completion of a new development code for the City. Without this guidance, it may be difficult to implement the current vision of the Draft Framework Map.
- Some of the property owners asked how quickly the new code could be completed, given its importance. Jana Easley indicated that, if the City's current proposed budget for 2021 is approved, the City will move forward the issuance of an RFP for the completion of the new code. RICK indicated that the code update process could take several months or upwards of a year. One property owner asked if the Comprehensive Plan effort could be combined with the code update effort. Jana Easley indicated that the way the current process is organized, it would be difficult to formally combine the Comprehensive Plan with the code effort. However, it may be possible to start on the code update process as soon as funding is approved, so that there is a period of overlap between the end of the Comprehensive Plan process, and the code update process. Having the processes overlap would help with the integration of the details of the two efforts.
- Jana Easley indicated that until the code update is complete, the likely route for any new projects in Lafayette would be the PUD (Planned Unit Development) process. However, the property owners indicated that the PUD process can still be very subjective and make it difficult to gain approvals.
- One of the property owners emphasized that developers, given their knowledge of how projects work economically and are successfully implemented, can assist the Comprehensive Plan process with articulating the tools needed for implementation. For example, developers can provide information about how affordable housing projects are successfully completed in the region, from a feasibility perspective.

- It was noted that the majority of comments on the online mapping tool have involved comments tied to connectivity and mobility (as opposed to land use), and suggestions for how to improve mobility around different parts of Lafayette. One of the property owners noted that, while projects likely need greater density in order to work financially, there is inherent conflict between this potential density and the mobility issue (including traffic congestion concerns). Mobility is tightly wrapped up with the density issue. The plan needs to clearly show where connectivity improvements are needed.
- In general, the more subjective the plan is, the more chaotic the development process will be, going forward.
- One of the property owners suggested that it may be possible to have a code update only focus on certain geographic areas within the City, in order to make the code update process easier (as opposed to covering the whole city). Erie, for example, has worked on code updates that apply to only certain areas. It may make sense to provide for more detailed planning and implementation efforts, focused on particular focus areas around Lafayette.
- An example of the importance of connectivity is evident in the area around 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe. Residents of Indian Peaks would love to have better multi-modal connections to the coffee shops, restaurants, and other amenities at 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe. The area represents a great opportunity to create additional neighborhoods to complement the retail uses at 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe. Normally residential developments occur, and retail areas are developed once the population is in place. In the case of 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe, the reverse occurred. The property owners around 95<sup>th</sup> and Arapahoe worked very hard to make the developments at this corner successful, despite not having neighborhoods fully integrated into the project. The area is just missing the connections from existing retail to surrounding neighborhoods.

## Discussion of Approval Process and Involvement of City Staff

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- One of the property owners asked, as the process goes forward, who has the final word on what goes into the plan? The consultants? The CAC? Staff?, etc.. Britt and Jana indicated that the official approval of the plan would be by the Planning Commission, with ratification and adoption of the plan by the City Council. Britt Palmberg indicated that the RICK consultant team would be responsible for integrating all of the input received from the community and various stakeholders, in the crafting of the actual plan document, with review by City staff. The plan document would be reviewed by the approval bodies and the City staff, and everyone in the community would have the

opportunity to provide input as the final document comes into focus and is drafted and finalized.

## Discussion of Engagement with Property Owners Going Forward

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- Roger Caruso indicated that he works with a number of property owners, and there are additional property owners that would be good to engage in discussions like this. Roger will be providing additional names to the consultant team. RICK emphasized that it welcomed input from any additional property owners in the area, as the plan continues to move toward finalization.
- The property owners indicated their appreciation for the opportunity to weigh in on the Comprehensive Plan at this stage in the process. Some of the property owners may wish to discuss their properties or concerns directly with the consultant team, and RICK indicated that additional meetings with individual property owners would be welcome. Some of the property owners noted that they will be providing formal notes and comments on the Draft Framework Map to the consultant team and staff, for the record. The group also expressed an interest in continuing to have meetings like this as the process moves forward, to ensure that the input of property owners is sufficiently integrated into the Comprehensive Plan process.