

Section 9.0

Implementation and Use



9.0 Introduction

The implementation of this Comprehensive Plan will be achieved through adherence to the Future Land Use Map in Section 3 and the major strategies and key policies in Sections 5, 6, and 7. The Comprehensive Plan should be consulted by City Council and appointed City officials and staff when considering development proposals, updating land use regulations, working on intergovernmental issues, outlining work programs, preparing annual budgets, and reviewing progress toward achieving City goals. The Plan should also be used to guide Thornton residents, area land owners, and project applicants concerning land planning and community development objectives.

As emphasized in Section 8, the Comprehensive Plan should be used by other public agencies, business interests and the non-profit sector in partnership with the City to achieve Thornton's community vision. The Comprehensive Plan is an overall policy document that is not only linked to numerous other City planning tools (e.g., intergovernmental agreements, development regulations, functional plans, and capital improvement programs), it is also closely dependent upon the implementation of a variety of other legislative, regulatory, technical, and financing mechanisms, requiring coordination and cooperation among many community interests. A complete update to the Comprehensive Plan, including a review of the overall vision and its core goals should occur approximately every 5 years.



9.1 Catalyst Actions

The core Plan goals described in Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 along with their major strategies and policies provide the foundation for achieving Thornton’s vision. Fourteen “catalyst actions” have been identified that are required to implement the major strategies identified for each core Plan goal. Catalyst actions are defined as those key policies and/or recommendations that, once initiated, will dictate the success of the Plan more than any other program or activity.

CATALYST ACTIONS FOR A CITY OF QUALITY AND DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS

There are five catalyst actions identified to implement the major strategies associated with a City of Quality and Diverse Neighborhoods:

1. Assess creation of internal City organization to strengthen neighborhood planning and monitor neighborhood conditions

Background

In the absence of strong community institutions with a history of promoting neighborhood revitalization the City has to take the lead in initiating a change in direction as it relates to existing development. This is typical of older, first tier suburban communities and is already occurring in other similar communities in the Denver metropolitan area. One of the first places to effect change is in assessing the creation of an internal City organization focused on neighborhood planning and issues. This has several important benefits:

- The City has the opportunity to establish the initial agenda for neighborhood action and match the level of effort to the resources available
- Existing programs can be modified to address neighborhood issues in new and unique ways that reduce need for new resources

- Expectations can be managed more effectively and the importance and role of residents, homeowners, and other potential partners in neighborhood revitalization activities can be established up-front

Best Practices and Tools

Most mature cities have some form of internal organization that is devoted to issues related to neighborhood revitalization. The following two examples illustrate different approaches to integrating neighborhood revitalization into a City's organizational structure.

The City of Aurora, Colorado has a Neighborhood Services Department which handles a number of neighborhood related programs on behalf of its neighborhoods. These include: zoning and code enforcement, regular multifamily rental housing inspections, other housing inspection on a complaint basis, provides neighborhood liaison and assistance to more than 300 neighborhood associations registered with the City, and administers a fence replacement program using special improvement district funding.

The City of Overland Park, Kansas has a "Neighborhood Preservation Program" with two components: traditional code enforcement and a neighborhood conservation program. The neighborhood conservation program helps older neighborhoods develop working neighborhood organizations to improve communication within a neighborhood and between neighborhoods and the City and to undertake revitalization efforts on their own. The program helps residents organize new neighborhood groups, provides short term support to the new groups and leadership and communications training for its leaders and members. It also provides a number of online guides and brochures that address community organizing and code issues. As the number of neighborhoods organized increase, the City can designate neighborhood planning areas as a focus for more specific revitalization actions.



Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Assess creation of internal City organization to strengthen neighborhood planning and monitor neighborhood conditions” include:

- City of Aurora, Colorado Neighborhood Services Department
- Adams County Housing Authority
- Colorado Housing Counseling Coalition
- Brothers Redevelopment, a local non-profit housing redeveloper

2. Assess creation of external organizations to take lead on neighborhood stabilization and revitalization

Background

A critical need in initiating a neighborhood revitalization program in a community that has not traditionally had one is getting residents, homeowners, property owners and others actively engaged in the process. In some communities this is done by building on existing strong neighborhood organizations. In communities where there is a need to develop strong neighborhood organizations a different approach is needed. In these communities the City can initiate a city-wide, non-profit neighborhood organization which can be a partner with the City in establishing individual neighborhood organizations, providing organizational support and training programs, carrying out initial neighborhood revitalization programs, and broadening the base of support and commitment to neighborhoods. The benefits of having such a city-wide nonprofit to assist the City include:

- Having a partner with more grass-roots connections to the various neighborhoods within the community which facilitates communication, the setting of priorities, and taking action
- Establishing role expectations that the public sector can facilitate, provide governmental services, and bring limited resources to neighborhood revitalization, but that ultimately residents and property owners are responsible for reinvesting in their own homes and neighborhoods
- Opening up a whole range of neighborhood revitalization actions that would be difficult for a governmental entity to carry out
- Providing an entity to work with in public-private partnership to leverage limited resources and divide the work load while building support for neighborhood revitalization

Best Practices and Tools

Most communities that have taken a pro-active role in neighborhood revitalization have established formal public/private partnerships, some with existing community organizations and some with new organizational entities that they have helped to form. The consensus is that locally based community organizations and smaller scale public-private partnerships play vital roles for revitalization.

One of the best examples of local government led advocacy organizations is the “First Suburbs Consortium (FSC) in Ohio. The FSC was established in Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati to address issues related to the revitalization of aging housing and deteriorated commercial districts in the first suburbs. One of the tools they have used is called “Home Enhancement Loan Program” (HELP) a public-private partnership in which residents of the first suburbs can remodel their homes at lower interest rates.



Other communities have developed similar programs including Minnesota’s “This Old House” program, Missouri’s “Neighborhood Preservation Act”, and Michigan’s older housing renovation incentives.

Longmont, Colorado has taken a different approach by having a robust program for training community leadership and helping form individual neighborhood organizations to act as community partners.

Arvada, Colorado uses its Housing Authority, established in 1976, as the outside organization. Its work is staffed by the City of Arvada’s Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Division within the Community Development Department.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Assess creation of external organizations to take lead on neighborhood stabilization and revitalization” include:

- First Suburbs Consortium
- City of Arvada’s Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization Division
- Longmont, Colorado

3. Develop and implement a periodic program for assessing the condition of neighborhoods

Background

As Thornton neighborhoods age there is evidence of declining maintenance within certain neighborhoods. Declining maintenance may increase in the future due to an aging population, and increasingly functionally-obsolete housing in terms of size and amenities. A systematic program of monitoring of existing neighborhoods will provide the following benefits to the City:

- Fully understand the current conditions in its neighborhoods
- Note the direction of change, improving or declining, in its neighborhoods
- Tailor policies and programs for maximum benefit at minimum cost
- Provide information to neighborhood residents and organizations to make them a more effective partner in their own neighborhood's enhancement
- Set priorities among competing needs in situations of limited resources
- Evaluate the effectiveness of programs in helping neighborhoods revitalize
- Establish effective work programs

Best Practices and Tools

A number of cities and groups across the country concerned with neighborhood revitalization have been developing programs to monitor neighborhood change in a systematic manner. The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) is a collaborative effort by the Urban Institute and its partners to develop and use neighborhood information systems in local policy making and community building. The partners in this effort include the Atlanta Project, the Boston Foundation's "Boston Persistent Poverty Project" the Center on Urban Poverty and Social Change at Case Western Reserve University, the Piton Foundation in Denver, the Urban Strategies Council in Oakland, the Providence Plan, and the DC Agenda Project in Washington, DC.



NNIP partners all operate neighborhood indicator systems. The institutions may differ in form and focus, but they all: (1) build and operate an information system on neighborhood conditions in their cities; (2) promote the practical use of data by community and city leaders; and (3) emphasize using information to build the capacities of institutions and residents in distressed neighborhoods.

The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance which is part of Baltimore's Healthy Neighborhood Initiative uses indicators on housing price and condition decline; home sales "days on market" increases; high vacancy percentage; high percentage of code violation / poor condition homes to monitor neighborhood health.

Kansas City, Missouri's Neighborhood Assessment Program uses a self assessment process where residents and others participate in identifying neighborhood features, needs and assets within one of four neighborhood types: developing, conservation, stabilization or redeveloping. Staff provides factual data and statistics to provide guidance in the assessment process.

The Urban Ecology Coalition in Minneapolis created a Neighborhood Sustainability Indicators Guidebook in 1999 which outlines how local neighborhoods can create neighborhood sustainability indicators for themselves. The guidebook uses several neighborhoods in Minneapolis as test cases in the development of sustainability indicators.

The final example is the Piton Foundations work in Denver. As a founding member of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership they have been instrumental in the development and use of neighborhood-level information systems in local policymaking and community building. Their own program, "Neighborhood Facts" was started based on Piton's ... "belief that philanthropic and community-building efforts are durable only if they are based on reliable and objective information."

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Develop and implement a periodic program for assessing the condition of neighborhoods include:

- Urban Institute
- Piton Foundation
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Colorado Housing and Finance Authority
- DRCOG
- Adams County Housing Authority
- Local banks

4. Update the Housing Master Plan including provisions for a diversity of housing choices

Background

With the adoption of the 2007 City of Thornton Comprehensive Plan, it will be time to update the Thornton Housing Master Plan. The current Thornton Housing Master Plan was updated in 2000 following adoption of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan. The Housing Master Plan will take issues identified in the Comprehensive Plan and refine them based on the current housing situation and specific recommendations and actions needed to achieve the City’s vision. The Housing Master Plan should look in some detail at the City’s diversity of housing choices.



Having a diversity of housing choices that include a balance which ranges from affordable housing to executive housing; from low density single family homes to multifamily units; from homes for first time homeowners, to move-up homes to senior housing, and new forms of housing such as work force housing, life style housing and more urban forms of housing as part of mixed use projects should all be considered in the Housing Master Plan.

The Housing Master Plan should be developed with the following in mind:

- Within the context of a more pro-active approach to neighborhood revitalization which is an essential component of the Comprehensive Plan
- Coordinating housing development standards for new construction with housing standards for existing housing, both rental and owner occupied
- Coordinating housing programs with neighborhood revitalization efforts to insure more efficient and effective utilization of limited resources
- Illustration of a diversity of new housing types for Thornton and how they could fit into the community. Providing this now diversity of housing then builds support for these types of housing among residents and potential housing developers

Best Practices and Tools

Most cities that develop comprehensive plans have housing master plans as a component. The following examples are provided because they show a particular aspect of housing master plans of value in preparing Thornton's Housing Master Plan.

Wakefield, Mass developed a housing master plan in 2003. Of particular interest in this housing master plan is how the City of Wakefield evaluated new forms of housing desired in their community. In the Plan they created “development option scenarios” which looked at four specific development scenarios and developed models for specific sites to evaluate how these housing types could fit within the community. The models are used to build consensus around needed changes in design and development standards and to suggest design and dimensional qualities that balance private and public objectives.

Howard County, Maryland developed a housing master plan focused on senior housing, the “Howard County Senior Housing Master Plan”. The Plan has three primary goals which relate its senior housing to broader neighborhood revitalization objectives and diversity of housing. These goals are to:

- Provide housing for older adults within stable and attractive communities through maintenance, renovation and modification of existing homes
- Produce new housing that meets the needs of older adults while not detracting from the existing neighborhoods
- Provide affordable and diverse housing to meet the needs of low and moderate income seniors

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Update the Housing Master Plan including provisions for a diversity of housing choices” include:

- DRCOG
- Adams County Housing Authority



- Local Developers
- Non-profit organizations

5. Develop programs to ensure an adequate supply of quality community and neighborhood scale commercial centers and decrease underutilized retail space through redevelopment to other uses

Background

Healthy neighborhoods need an adequate supply of quality community and neighborhood scale commercial centers that provide the goods and services needed by local residents. Commercial centers in older areas of the community may need to be revitalized to maintain an appropriate quality of life for the community. In Thornton, an analysis of available retail space in the southern part of Thornton shows an oversupply of retail space in relationship to the current population. Even with projected growth in residential population there is still an oversupply of retail space. This contributes to the decline in the quality and economic viability of existing shopping centers which in turn negatively impacts neighborhood stability and opportunities for revitalization.

Programs to revitalize those centers that can be competitive and programs to decrease the existing supply of underutilized retail space in those centers that are not appropriate for revitalization would benefit Thornton. Reducing retail space by building residential uses, either stand alone or within mixed use projects would have the added benefit of adding buying power to support the remaining retail space in the area.

Best Practices and Tools

There are numerous examples of older shopping centers being redeveloped across the country. Typically these take one of the following three forms:

1. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

- Thornton’s North Valley Tech Center with its educational focus and Pinnacle Center with its health services focus are two local examples of adaptive reuse

2. Total redevelopment to a new mixed use project.

- Northgate Village Homes in North Kansas City, Missouri, is a predominately residential redevelopment for single family, multifamily, patio homes and senior housing with a small amount of retail on a 29 acre site. The project used Tax Increment Funding (TIF) for infrastructure improvements to support the project. The City funded the improvement up-front and was reimbursed from TIF proceeds.
- Lakewood, Colorado’s demolition of the Villa Italia Mall and the creation of the Belmar project
- St Paul, Minnesota demolished the Phalen Center, an old strip center, built a lake where the parking lot was located and is building housing, offices and stores around it

3. Renovation with additional mixed use development.

- The Villages at Shirlington in Arlington, Virginia is the redevelopment of a 1950’s suburban mall into a new mixed use “Main Street” type of project. The original buildings were renovated with limestone and granite exteriors. Surface parking lots were developed with multifamily housing and parking garages were constructed as shared facilities. The site was reconfigured to have narrower streets, wider sidewalks, more landscaping, street furniture, and other amenities. The 25 acre site has a land use mix of 39 percent office, 8 percent retail and 49 percent housing, with the remainder open space.



- Winter Park Village in Winter Park, Florida took a vintage 1960's mall and turned it into a town center. Some buildings were demolished, new buildings were constructed to create public spaces and a more urban sense of place. The Dillard's department store was adaptively reused as loft housing. Future phases call for reweaving the circulation pattern originally in this part of the city to reconnect with the original retail streets in the area.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to "Develop programs to decrease underutilized retail space through redevelopment to other uses" include:

- Urban Land Institute
- Local developers

CATALYST ACTIONS FOR A CITY OF PLENTIFUL QUALITY JOBS

There are four catalyst actions identified to implement the major strategies associated with a City of Plentiful Quality Jobs:

1. Implement the North Washington Subarea Plan: Develop Zoning, Infrastructure, and Concept Plans for all Land Uses with an Emphasis on the Corporate Campus and Urban Village Areas

Background

With limited land not currently committed or being considered for regional employment uses, the primary opportunity to accomplish the core Plan goal of Plentiful Quality Jobs is in the North Washington Subarea. Therefore the most important catalyst action is to implement the North Washington Subarea Plan. The development of zoning, infrastructure and concept plans for the Corporate Campus and the Urban Village should have the highest priority. Important partnerships must be forged with landowners, developers and the real estate community to create these plans.

The benefits of implementing the North Washington Subarea Plan are immeasurable. It would set the standard for non-residential development in the Denver's north metropolitan area, demonstrate Thornton's appeal to the market and its willingness to be a catalyst for new development, and set a precedent for other high-access locations where the Comprehensive Plan calls for regional employment.

Best Practices and Tools

The best practices of large-scale, cohesively planned developments generally involve projects that are under the control of a single entity, at least initially. That is not the case in the North Washington Subarea. To achieve the same coordination and synergies in the North Washington Subarea, a range of approaches are possible:



- Actively engage in land assembly
- Assist in the creation of a consortium of property owners in a business relationship whereby they could pool their interests and share in the development value based on an agreed upon formula
- Encourage or require development meeting certain standards whenever and wherever the development takes place by providing certain base infrastructure such as the primary road network and trunk-line utilities (as a ‘master developer’ might do)

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Implement the North Washington Subarea Plan” include:

- Urban Land Institute
- Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute
- Local and national developers
- Subarea landowners

2. Fortify Business Development Activities; Include Initiatives in both Retail Recruitment and Attracting Higher Quality Employment Generators

Background

This action relates primarily to the way in which Thornton presents itself as a community in which there are clear advantages for businesses to locate and operate. Recognizing the need of the community to have both economic generators (retail businesses) and employment generators (office, commercial and industrial businesses) - future success will call for parallel emphasis on encouraging entrepreneurship, matching education curriculum toward the needs of current and potential business, marketing Thornton's unique strengths, such as the medial complex and regional accessibility and intensifying efforts to have recruiting initiatives reach new industries and markets. These elements call for a three pronged approach including proactive marketing/recruitment, reactive marketing/recruitment and the fortification of partnerships with a number of groups involved in regional economic development, workforce training, business finance, industry promotion and networking.

As anticipated in the recent Targeted Industry Marketing Study (TIMS), the Business Development Offices should strengthen its activities in retail recruitment as well as to push even further attraction initiatives geared toward recruiting higher quality employment generators in specific industries. In doing so, the Business Development Office should spearhead the efforts of assuring that the development climate - in terms of real estate, product, infrastructure and the review/approval process - is attractive and competitive with other jurisdictions.



The benefits of this catalyst action potentially include higher paying jobs for Thornton residents, an increase in the ratio of jobs-to-housing, an increase in aggregate payroll and an increase in percentage of job growth versus percentage of housing growth. This would be accompanied by a corresponding shift away from the notion of Thornton as being only a “bedroom” community. Strengthening the relationships between the City and existing business would also likely increase their level of civic commitment. Increased business involvement would help to further the objectives of other elements of this Comprehensive Plan.

Best Practices and Tools

The best practices in recruiting both retail businesses and employment generators, particularly those that serve more than a local market, involve three separate approaches to business attraction: 1.) Pro-active business recruitment activities including participation with industrial trade groups, vertical marketing initiatives and networking within specific targeted industries. 2.) Reactive business recruitment activities include increasing the comprehensive business data for the area, bolstering accessibility of area specific data and promptly responding to all inquiries for business information. 3.) Increasing the partnering efforts with state and regional economic development agencies. Thornton should “piggy-back” their efforts with those agencies undertaking similar efforts in broader markets.

The approach is to work closely with state and regional economic development agencies and to prepare the best possible response to firm inquiries in conjunction with direct recruiting efforts. The best possible response includes both the real estate opportunity, as well as providing an attractive overall climate for business development. This business development climate affects not only the recruitment of new firms, but encourages entrepreneurship and the growth of and the catering to existing businesses

Activities in these categories typically include:

- Improving communications initiatives and gearing the unique marketing message to facilitate businesses as diverse as home based businesses and larger regional and national employment generators
- Bolstering Thornton business presence on the internet
- Initiating and increasing partnerships with a wide variety of business organizations
- Strengthening relationships with Thornton’s existing businesses
- Bolstering networking opportunities for property owners, developers, corporate recruiters, businesses, and industry consultants
- Creating networking opportunities in Thornton
- Facilitating the availability of business support services such as incubator space, financial and business planning advice, and workforce training
- Working with local educational initiatives to coordinate training and assist in curriculum development to assure that business needs are met

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Fortify Business Development Activities” include:

- Adams County Economic Development
- Adams County Workforce and Business Center
- Colorado State Office of Economic Development and International Trade



- CoreNet
- Industry Specific Trade Groups (e.g. American Council of Engineering Companies, Colorado Biotechnology Association, etc.)
- International Council of Shopping Centers
- Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation
- Metro North Chamber of Commerce
- National Association of Industrial and Office Parks

3. Assure that there is Sufficient Land Available, Served, and Zoned for Retail and Related Commercial Use

Background

To implement the major strategy of preserving and enhancing the retail sales base, it is critical to assure that there is sufficient land available, served and zoned for retail and related commercial use. The land must meet a hierarchy of needs ranging from sites with a regional draw to smaller neighborhood-serving areas. In older portions of Thornton, partnerships with property owners and managers should help reposition or redevelop declining shopping areas, with the assistance, where appropriate, of the Thornton Urban Renewal Authority.

The benefit of this catalyst action is primarily an adequate tax base that will allow the City to maintain a high level of service and amenities to its residents. Area residents will also then be able to meet their shopping and service needs within the community, reducing travel times and keeping the sales within the community. The businesses themselves tend to be more supportive of civic and community activities within the community where they are located.

Best Practices and Tools

On the issue of adequate zoning, the adoption of the comprehensive plan and subsequent rezoning should assure adequate land in appropriate locations. In the neighborhood areas where community-serving commercial uses are envisioned, but not called out on a site-specific basis, clear standards and criteria can be developed to clarify where and under what circumstances they will be allowed. Specifically new residents to an area or development could be notified of the possibility of future commercial retail development.

Regarding redevelopment or revitalization of older shopping centers, there are many examples in the Denver metro area where commercial areas, of a vintage similar to Thornton's older areas, have been or are being redeveloped into thriving mixed-use developments. Notable examples include Cinderella City in Englewood, Villa Italia (now Belmar) in Lakewood, the Holiday Drive-In site in Boulder, and several "brownfield" sites in Denver.

While not mixed use centers, the Crossroads Mall in Boulder and the Northglenn Mall (now Northglenn Marketplace) has also been recently redeveloped. While these were regional centers and larger properties than found in Thornton, the principles can be applied and similar, if smaller-scale, results could be achieved.

In all of these cases an urban renewal process or other direct involvement by the host community was involved. However, with limited exception, none of the cities actually acquired the property. The redevelopment was achieved by working with the existing landowners and using subsidies, incentives, infrastructure and public improvements to provide support to the development plans and create a viable project.



Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Assure that there is sufficient land available, served, and zoned for retail and related commercial use” include:

- Local landowners
- Local and national developers

4. Plan and Zone the Appropriate Transit Station Areas for the Desired Uses and to Avoid Premature, Speculative Development

Background

While the FasTracks system is not expected to open until at least 2015, steps taken now can preserve the opportunity to use the system to foster the goal of Thornton as a City of Plentiful Quality jobs. The most important action is to be resolute in planning and zoning the appropriate station areas for the desired uses and avoiding premature, speculative development. In this regard, an ongoing partnership with RTD in the planning and design of the station areas is critical to maximize the impact of the location in linking to developable parcels nearby.

The Regional Transportation District reports in its latest annual survey that recent development activity near transit station areas amounted to 11,825 residential units, 2,214 hotel rooms, 4.6 million square feet of retail space and 8.5 million square feet of office and institutional space—with more than an equal amount of development proposed for the future. Clearly the transit system will be a major force in shaping development patterns in the region in the future. Only the North End station as an example has the capacity to accommodate significant levels of development and the ability to offer plentiful, quality jobs. The important message is that the long term goal of achieving desirable mixed use development in these areas needs to be supported and maintained. Short term pressures to develop these areas with low intensity uses should be resisted.

Best Practices and Tools

One important tool could be the development of a sub-area plan, as was done in the North Washington Subarea. Such a plan could address issues such as development standards, overlay criteria, and transit-oriented development needs (parking ratios, density and mixed-use requirements, pedestrian enhancements, and connections to surrounding areas).

Another useful approach would be tracking case studies of the many metro area transit-oriented developments already under development. This would be an important input to the process by understanding the role the municipalities played and what they see as mistakes to avoid.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to Plan and zone the appropriate transit station areas for the desired uses and to avoid premature, speculative development” include:

- RTD
- Local landowners
- Local and national developers



CATALYST ACTIONS FOR A CITY OF GREAT AMENITIES

There are five catalyst actions identified to implement the major strategies associated with a City of Great Amenities:

1. Prepare specific area or subarea plans for each of the six Placemaking Districts. Commit to the concept through ordinance development.

Background

A fundamental concept of the Comprehensive Plan relates to the creation of special “Placemaking” Districts to create what is desired in every city – spaces that people can feel are special or unique to their community, afford public celebration and are oriented in a manner to enhance the quality of life.

The unique Placemaking Districts in Thornton are designated as areas that offer similar design characteristics and compatible land uses, providing specialty services, interaction and experiences for the community. As such, the identification and planning for these areas to reach their fullest potential is critical.

Best Practices and Tools

Many communities across the country have recognized the need to celebrate unique spaces and as such, have designated “special use districts” where concentrated investment has yielded significant results within a focused area. Examples include the concentrated effort on behalf of the cities of Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Des Moines, Iowa to expand services to attract the amateur sports market as an economic development tool. The City of Arvada has invested heavily in the creation of their arts program, and has become a leading center for the visual and performing arts in the state of Colorado. Naperville, Illinois has strategically planned over the years to capitalize on their link to the greater Chicago region, and as such has successfully developed a contemporary “urban village” that integrates mixed-use development, public open space and transit facilities.

Countless other examples across the country exist where proactive measures have been taken to identify critical resources, mass and strategic marketing to develop and grow around a focused theme. A common element for all of these success stories is the initial identification of what made the place unique, and how they could strategically capitalize on those characteristics to leverage additional development.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Prepare subarea plans for each of the six Placemaking Districts” include:

- The Health One North Suburban Medical Center
- Thornton Arts Council
- School Districts
- Local Sport Groups (e.g. Soccer League, Little League programs etc.)
- Rangeview Library District
- Corporate / Private Developers

2. Complete a functional study of the Placemaking Cultural Trail and define design standards along with recommended locational placement of these standards.

Background

A dimension of amenities relates to the creation of the “Placemaking Cultural Trail”, which is envisioned to circle Thornton and connect all of the proposed Placemaking Districts as well as other civic, environmental, neighborhoods and cultural community destinations.



As envisioned, the Placemaking Cultural Trail is more than just a recreational corridor. It serves as the “interstate” of the Thornton Trail System, connecting the community’s neighborhoods and linking to the larger regional system. The Placemaking Cultural Trail includes both existing and proposed trails in the current Parks and Open Space Master Plan as well as other physical linkages on multi-use sidewalks along key transportation corridors of the city. Trail standards would include the design for multi-use accommodations (both pedestrian and cyclists) as well as an increased level of amenities. These additional amenities could include interpretive signage, lighting and pedestrian furniture along the route.

Best Practices and Tools

The Thornton Placemaking Cultural Trail is intended to be an urban trail experience, offering both recreational and an alternative transit option. The City of Philadelphia “Freedom Trail” is an example of an urban trail that connects cultural and historical destinations in an urban environment. The Riverwalk in Ft. Lauderdale has become the “spine” of the community, connecting the civic center of the city with neighborhoods and tourist destinations along the beachfront. In smaller communities, such as Wabash, Indiana, the use of a cultural trail provides both a physical connection to civic destinations and a symbolic history-tour of the development pattern of the city. Many other communities use these urban trail systems for both recreational and transit purposes, and augment these systems with interpretive or pedestrian-amenities that heighten the trail experience.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “Complete a functional study of the Placemaking Cultural Trail” include:

- Colorado Department of Natural Resources
- Colorado Department of Transportation (Federal Funding)
- Adams County Historical Society
- Bicycle Groups (e.g. North Front Range Bicycle Coalition)
- Thornton Arts Council
- Private Foundations / Endowments for the Arts (e.g. Colorado Council on the Arts)
- Private Organization or Service Clubs (e.g. Rotary)
- Grant Programs (e.g. Kodak American Greenways)

3. Identify various funding resources and partnerships to design and implement public realm improvements along key gateways and corridors.

Background

The City of Thornton has initiated several enhancement projects along key community gateways and corridors, most notably along I-25. These enhancements illustrate the potential to accentuate community character through quality design. They also demonstrate the power of collaboration through the creative interjurisdictional partnerships to get projects completed at a higher level of design.

The continued investment in the public realm is critical to position Thornton as a competitive community in the metro Denver region.



Best Practices and Tools

Key first impressions to a community are made in the physical environs of the city's entrances and linkages. Today, engineering solutions for designing better roads and highways also include a closer look at the surrounding context. This design movement, called "Context Sensitive Solutions" looks at improvements to the roadway and other public infrastructure that is more compatible and respectful of the surroundings. It also promotes a sense of civic identity and pride by improving the overall visual quality of the community. In turn, additional investment is made by private entities and often new development is leveraged from this investment.

Many communities are now recognizing the importance of creating a strong public realm. A local example includes the Design Guidelines for Denver Gateways. This documents key corridors and gateways to the Denver and identifies critical design needs for the enhancement of these public realm areas. The Gateway Concept Plan emphasizes the importance of high quality public improvements, especially streets. The arterial streets are planned as parkways with landscaped medians, in the tradition of Denver's City Beautiful Movement Parkway System. These parkways provide a positive image, which is to be reinforced by the close coordination of buildings, landscaping and improvements constructed along them.

The creation of acceptable standards for public realm improvements is the first step. Creating creative partnerships with non-profit groups, allied organizations, and elected officials are critical in getting projects "built." Several avenues of funding are available, some to non-profit groups, and others are funded by the federal government for community development programs. Critical planning is important, and the identification of a "pilot project" is typically a key initiative of a public realm enhancement program.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “identify various funding resources and partnerships for public realm improvements” include:

- Colorado Department of Transportation
- A “Community Enhancement Organization” made up of public and private stakeholder representatives with the mission to solicit funding, sponsorship and long-term oversight of community enhancement projects, such as gateway initiatives and corridor enhancements

4. Identify various funding resources and partnerships to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive areas.

Background

The natural and human environments are intimately connected. As such, our awareness of the impact we have on our environment has become more and more heightened. The role of being a good steward to the land and positive environmental management is to implement best practices in planning, development and design to minimize negative effects on the environment. Today, being “sustainable” is a term broadly used to market a community’s environmental stewardship, making sure that the community is a healthy place for the people that live and do business here today, and for years to come.

Wetlands and open space habitats provide unique environments for animals, plants and insects. These healthy environments benefit both wildlife and humans by protecting many of our key natural resources, including water supply and air quality.

The Comprehensive Plan for Thornton recognizes this desire to be sustainable, and as such encourages smart growth development principles as related to land planning, energy efficiency and conservation.



Best Practices and Tools

Awareness for greater sustainability and environmental stewardship includes programming efforts aimed at the education and implementation of recycling programs and energy/water conservation programs. It also includes a heightened awareness for the need to protect and preserve sensitive environmental areas.

Many communities have created property credits to private developers for environmental preservation. This practice involves providing credits or other development incentives to developers to ensure that a percentage of area is retained as open space in any development.

There are several soft programs that aid in the preservation and management of the open space in a community. The City of Broomfield, Colorado has initiated the “Keep Broomfield Neat Adopt-A-Street / Park / Open Space Litter Control Program” aimed at litter control for street segments, parks and open space areas around the community. Adopters can include individuals, civic organizations, garden clubs, school groups, scouts, employee associations, or church groups. South Bend, Indiana is recognized as a “Tree City” and has planted more than 2,600 trees since 2000 along the public right-of-way and in public open space areas. The City maintains a nursery which provides the trees for the parks and to reforest open space areas as a city-sponsored project.

Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “identify various funding resources and partnerships to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive areas” include:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Colorado Department of Natural Resources
- Advocacy Groups (e.g. Colorado Environmental Coalition, Environment Colorado)

5. Review and update as necessary a specific “brand” for the City to highlight specific design elements including, but not limited to, the Placemaking Districts, public realm and the Placemaking Cultural Trail.

Background

Promoting a community is not unlike the selling of a product. There is a need for an overarching theme, mission or focus that educates and informs the intended user, in this case residents, visitors and potential investors (developers). The need to have a consistent message in articulating this theme is critical, and can be utilized in both a tangible manner such as signage and a non-tangible manner, such as newsletter and media announcements.

With a common brand, the ability for people to recognize and identify with key community attributes becomes more apparent. The identification of a place through branding will translate into a stronger community vernacular, which reinforces the unique attributes of the city as a place to live, work and play.

Best Practices and Tools

The range in which branding is used to market community amenities is very broad – from the overall City logo to the branding at local neighborhood parks – each carry a message about how the city, its’ people and places are valued. Philadelphia has created a unique logo and design standards for the Ben Franklin Parkway that are used along the corridor and by adjacent cultural institutions to identify and promote the district. The non-profit organization, Indianapolis Downtown Inc., has developed a series of destination cultural districts within the city. Each district is identified with graphic signage, and coordinating media promotions highlighting neighborhood activities and events in the districts.



Organizations and Partnerships

Examples of organizations and partnerships which can play a role in undertaking the catalyst action to “to review and update community/city branding” include:

- Thornton Arts Council
- Metro North Chamber of Commerce
- Keep Thornton Beautiful

| CATALYST ACTIONS: QUALITY AND DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS | CATALYST ACTIONS: PLENTIFUL QUALITY JOBS | CATALYST ACTIONS: GREAT AMENITIES |
|--|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess creation of internal City organization to strengthen neighborhood planning and monitor neighborhood conditions 2. Assess creation of external organizations to take lead on neighborhood stabilization and revitalization 3. Develop and implement a periodic program for assessing the condition of neighborhoods 4. Update the Housing Master Plan including provisions for a diversity of housing choices 5. Develop programs to insure an adequate supply of quality community and neighborhood scale commercial centers and decrease underutilized retail space through redevelopment to other uses | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the North Washington Subarea Plan: Develop Zoning, Infrastructure, and Concept Plans for all Land Uses with an Emphasis on the Corporate Campus and Urban Village Areas 2. Broaden Business Development Activities beyond Retail Recruitment to Attracting Higher Quality Employers 3. Assure that there is Sufficient Land Available, Served, and Zoned for Retail and Related Commercial Use 4. Plan and Zone the Appropriate Transit Station Areas for the Desired Uses and to Avoid Premature, Speculative Development | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare specific area or subarea plans for each of the six Placemaking Districts. Commit to the concept through ordinance development 2. Complete a functional study of the Placemaking Cultural Trail and define design standards along with recommended locational placement of these standards 3. Identify various funding resources and partnerships to design and implement public realm improvements along key gateways and corridors 4. Identify various funding resources and partnerships to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive areas 5. Review and update as necessary a specific “brand” for the City to highlight specific design elements including, but not limited to, the Placemaking Districts, public realm and the Placemaking Cultural Trail |

▲ Table 9-1: Catalyst Actions for the Three Plan Goals

9.2 Plan Amendment

To be successful, comprehensive planning must be an on-going activity. As such, modifications to major strategies, refinements to policies, acknowledgement of completed actions, and updates to technical data should be considered when appropriate. If progress toward the overarching core Plan goals is not evident, the City should re-evaluate the policies within each major strategy and consider necessary amendments to more effectively accomplish the core Plan goals.

This Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed at least bi-annually to evaluate the achievement of specific actions and the effectiveness of key policies. The Progress Matrix, located in Appendix B, should be updated as actions are accomplished. The Comprehensive Plan should also be reviewed periodically when new circumstances or changing conditions warrant reconsideration. For example, after 2010 Census information is released, data in Section 2 should be updated.

Plan amendments should be very carefully evaluated in terms of their overall significance to achieving Plan goals. In particular, pressure to amend the Future Land Use Map to accommodate current market conditions may occur. The approval of multiple Plan amendments is an indicator of an incremental shift in policy direction. All Plan amendments should be thoroughly reviewed in the context of the major strategies they may impact.

To reflect changing conditions in the community, the Comprehensive Plan may be amended from time to time in accordance with the procedure set forth in this section. Modifications to the Comprehensive Plan can either be considered a major amendment or a minor amendment.



Major Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Substantial changes to the Comprehensive Plan, such as significant updates to information and/or adding elements to the text shall be in the interest of promoting the health, safety and general welfare of the community. Such changes shall be consistent with any intergovernmental agreements in place at the time of the amendment process and in accordance with one of the following:

1. It corrects an error in the current Comprehensive Plan adoption; events, trends, or facts evident after adoption of the Comprehensive Plan have changed the City Council's original findings made upon Plan adoption; or
2. Events, trends, or facts evident after adoption of the Comprehensive Plan have changed the character or condition of the community so as to make the proposed amendment necessary; or
3. Other changes to the Comprehensive Plan deemed necessary by the City, such as the need to integrate Subarea plans, area plans, corridor plans, or other special studies.

A major Comprehensive Plan amendment may be initiated by the City or property owners. Upon submittal of an application to the City and the publication of notice, the City Council shall hold a public hearing on the proposed amendment. The City Council may approve, deny or amend the proposal, based on the following criteria:

1. There has been a change in the area or in the conditions on which the current designation was based which warrants the amendment;
2. The density and intensity of the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment is sensitive to the existing land uses and is compatible with the existing adjacent land use designations;

3. The amendment will provide for orderly physical growth of the City, and foster safe, convenient and walkable neighborhoods and shopping districts;
4. There are or are planned to be adequate transportation, recreation, utility and other facilities to accommodate the uses and densities permitted by the proposed Comprehensive Plan designation;
5. The proposed change is in substantial conformance with the core Plan goals, major strategies or key policies;
6. Consideration of City Subarea Plans and Master Plans; or
7. The proposed amendment is consistent with current zoning of the site unless a zoning change request is under concurrent review.

Following City Council action on the proposed amendment, a Resolution shall be adopted accepting or denying the proposed amendment as an addition or change to the Comprehensive Plan.

Minor Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Minor amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to update statistical, quantitative or mapping information, address previous errors or omissions and to correct narrative or graphic information may also be initiated by the City or by property owners and forwarded to the City Council for review and action.

9.3 Plan Monitoring and Evaluation

Plan monitoring and evaluation involves tracking progress and setbacks in accomplishing core Plan goals, determining an appropriate response, and charting an effective course of action toward successful Plan implementation.



Two principle techniques are proposed for monitoring and evaluating the Comprehensive Plan:

1. Develop several key performance “indicators” that monitor plan progress. Indicators are specific measures that bear a direct or indirect relationship to initiating a major strategy, implementing a key policy, or accomplishing a prioritized action. By tracking selected indicators consistently over a number of years, trends can be evaluated, benchmarks identified, targets set, accomplishments determined, policies refined and actions adjusted as necessary to ensure that core Plan goals are being achieved.

2. Use a “Progress Matrix” to identify responsibilities and timeframes for accomplishing Plan actions. The progress matrix also serves as a checklist for monitoring progress toward accomplishing intangible or non-measurable objectives for which performance indicators cannot be established.

Table 9-2 identifies a variety of suggested performance indicators that represent quantitative measures. As information is gathered and analyzed over time, these performance indicators should be evaluated, refined and linked to qualitative Plan outcomes.

| SUGGESTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: QUALITY AND DIVERSE NEIGHBORHOODS | SUGGESTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: PLENTIFUL QUALITY JOBS | SUGGESTED PERFORMANCE INDICATORS: GREAT AMENITIES |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Building Permits for New Dwelling Units in Established Neighborhoods/Year • Number of Building Permits for Additions in Established Neighborhoods/Year • Number of Affordable Rental or Ownership Units/Year • Number of Foreclosures/Year • Median Sales Price by Housing Type/Year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs per Household • Number of Non-residential Building Permits Issued Annually (in square feet) • Number of Square Feet of Office and Industrial Lease Space Available • Year-End Vacancy Rate for Office and Industrial Lease Space • Annual Sales Tax Revenue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Miles of Trails • Number of Miles of Commuter Bike Routes (Dedicated Lanes) • Number of Acres of Parks, by Type (Regional/Community/Neighborhood) • Number of Acres of Open Space Acquired |

▲ Table 9-2: Suggested Performance Indicators

Performance Indicators

The following steps for preparing performance indicators are recommended:

1. Collect Data

Time-series data should be collected and entered into tables and graphs. Ideally, a five-year data trend should be maintained. The trend that is established provides the basis for identifying benchmarks, setting targets, and evaluating results. In the first few months of every year, data for the preceding year should be collected and added to the database for each established indicator.

2. Identify Benchmarks

The collected data provides a baseline from which to measure change. A benchmark is the baseline from which to evaluate either positive or negative change. A benchmark is determined by calculating the average of the data trend. Benchmarks should be established for each indicator and reviewed with the City Council.

3. Set Targets

In addition to benchmarks, targets for each indicator should be established and updated. A target can be a short-term, mid-term, or long-term objective toward the achievement of a core Plan goal or major strategy. Targeting of an indicator is the determination of a milestone that represents significant accomplishment. Some targets can be based on established service standards, such as 2.5 acres of neighborhood parks per 1,000 persons. Other targets must be determined through research with City departments or other agencies. Targets should be initially researched and reviewed by City staff and ultimately established by the City Council.



4. Evaluate Trends

Once tables and graphs are updated, benchmarks are identified, and targets are set, the trend for each indicator should be reviewed by City staff to determine either a positive or a negative movement relative to the achievement of a core Plan goal or major strategy. A periodic report should be prepared to provide a summary of evaluated trends, specifying which actions or events have influenced change. The report also serves to inform the general public of the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan as a policy tool for guiding decisions.

5. Update Indicators

New indicators should be added and existing indicators revised or even deleted as targets for each performance indicator are monitored and evaluated.

It is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan in order to gauge its success. Developing performance indicators and prioritizing actions using a Progress Matrix are two useful tools for monitoring the progress of the Plan's implementation.

**“Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision is just passing time.
Vision with action can change the world.”**

**- Joel Barker
The Power of Vision**