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MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission

THRU: Jan Yeckes, Planning Division Manager

FROM: Loretta Daniel, Long Range Planning Program Manager

DATE: December 29, 2020

SUBJECT: Update on the Watkins/Bennett Area Vision Study

BRYAN D. WEIMER, PWLF
Director

Background

At the Planning Commission study session on January 21, 2020, staff introduced the rationale and the work plan for the Tier 1 study, which was one of the priority recommendations of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the study was to add clarity to the goals and policies identified in the Comprehensive Plan for Tier 1, specifically by providing more guidance on future land uses (e.g., types and intensity of land uses), the transportation network, and recreational opportunities. The scope of work was presented which outlined a phased planning process with public open houses and specific meetings to obtain input from stakeholders, an Advisory Committee, and the public. Planning Commission concurred with staff on the importance of this study and the project commenced.

Planning Process

Early on, the name of the study was changed to the Watkins/Bennett Area Vision Study to better reflect the geographic area of the study and to make the name more understandable for the public. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the public outreach strategy was revised and currently includes the project webpage, virtual meetings of the Advisory and Technical Committees, virtual public meetings, and on-line surveys. If COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed before the fall, staff will consider whether options such as in-person open houses will be held.

The study process has been modified slightly and is organized into the following four phases with the conclusion anticipated to be in fall 2021. With this update to the Planning Commission, we will be concluding Phase 1.

Phase 1: Listen and Define. In this phase, the Existing Conditions Report provides the basis for the first Advisory Committee and public meetings, and the specific tasks are:



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- Hold the first Advisory Committee and Technical Committee meetings to identify key goals, issues, and opportunities;
- Interview various stakeholders (e.g., Fire District, groundwater management districts, etc.);
- Hold the first community open house and online survey; and
- Present the findings of the online survey, goals, guiding principles, and public comments to the Planning Commission.

Phase 2: Envision. In this phase, alternative land use concepts will be developed that reflect the goals and themes identified in Phase 1, and are based on the low and high population projections for the study area. Specific tasks are:

- Develop and evaluate the land use concepts;
- Hold the second Advisory Committee meeting to review the concepts;
- Present the concepts to the Planning Commission; and
- Hold the second community open house and online survey.

Phase 3: Refine and Assess. During this phase, the preferred land use concept will be refined and the vision study will be drafted. Specific tasks are:

- Develop key directions, refine the preferred land use concept, and staff writes the draft Vision Study;
- Hold the third Advisory Committee meeting to review the draft Vision Study; and
- Present the draft Vision Study to the Planning Commission.

Phase 4: Confirm and Adopt. This final phase starts with presenting the draft Vision Study to the public, holding the public review period, and preparing the final study for adoption, which could be either through a separate subarea plan or as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. Specific tasks include:

- Hold the third community open house to present the draft Vision Study and the public comment period begins;
- Make revisions to the draft Vision Study based on all comments received;
- Hold the fourth Advisory Committee meeting to review the final version of the study; and
- Hold a public hearing at the Planning Commission for the adoption of the Vision Study.

Summary of Phase 1

An Existing Conditions Report was drafted that is a summary of the present conditions in the study area and provides insight into the issues and opportunities that can be addressed by the study. This report includes information on demographics, zoning and land uses, land ownership, infrastructure, public facilities and services, natural features, as well as other jurisdictions' plans that may affect the study area. The Existing Conditions Report is attached and also can be viewed on the project webpage at www.arapahoe.gov/watkinsbennettstudy.



The Advisory Committee met virtually on November 12, 2020 to review highlights from the Existing Conditions Report. The Committee's role is to provide advice and their perspective to guide the study and is comprised of property owners, business owners, developers, and representatives from I-70 REAP, the Town of Bennett, City of Aurora, and Adams County. The Advisory Committee is expected to meet three more times during the study. Another committee that is part of this process is the Technical Committee, which is comprised of staff from the Public Works and Development and the Open Spaces departments. This committee has met once and will provide valuable analysis of the land use concepts as they are being developed in Phase 2.

The first of three public meetings was held virtually on December 9, 2020 to introduce the public to the vision study and some key elements of the Existing Conditions Report. The public was asked for their comments via an online survey which will be open for four weeks and close on January 6, 2021. Property owners in the study area were notified of the public meeting by postcard, and the study received coverage in the I-70 Scout newspaper following the meeting. A second postcard mailing was made in mid-December to encourage residents and property owners to complete the survey. A video of the public meeting can be viewed on the project webpage.

Throughout Phase 1, various stakeholders were interviewed to provide additional information for the study area. These stakeholders included the Sheriff's Office, State Engineer's Office, the Fire Districts, the groundwater management districts, CDOT, and other entities that can provide additional insights for the study. The study team is also working closely with staff overseeing the updates to the Transportation Master Plan and the Open Spaces Master Plan.

Presentation at Study Session

In Phase 1, staff has carried out a listening phase to identify key community values as well as issues and concerns that can inform the study moving forward. At the January 19, 2021 study session, staff will present the results of the online survey which should assist in developing the guiding principles for the study. A summary report of the survey findings will be distributed to the Planning Commission in advance of the meeting.

Action Requested

This is an information update on the progress to date for the Vision Study, and staff will be seeking concurrence on the guiding principles that we expect will arise from the online survey.

Attachments

Watkins/Bennett Area Vision Study Existing Conditions Report



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