



# KEY ISSUES for the Comprehensive Plan

November 26, 2008

## Overview

This packet summarizes the Commerce City planning challenges and opportunities the planning team has heard through interviews, from City Council, from the Staff Working Group, Citizen Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Group, the public meetings, and the on-line issues poll. An issues poll is also still posted on the website: [www.CCCvision.com](http://www.CCCvision.com).

Issues the comprehensive plan will address are grouped under the following headings:

- Land Use and Environment,
- Community,
- Economic Development and Fiscal,
- Transportation, and
- Other.

The Citizen Advisory Committee helped the planning team prioritize issues. Their top issues as a group are generally consistent with public input. Priority issues are:

- City image;
- Linking community north/south areas;
- City financial strategy;
- Reinvestment in older housing areas and housing issues (i.e., absentee landlords);
- Neighborhood/industrial conflicts;
- Jobs and commercial housing balance;
- Building on community assets; and
- Regional coordination of transportation issues.

## Land Use and Environment Issues

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The Comprehensive Plan should address the following Land Use and Environment Issues:

- **Linking Community North/South Geographic Areas:** The city's linear stretched out form and strikingly different Historic City and Northern Range make it appear sometimes as two communities. The plan should find ways to physically and culturally link older residential and industrial parts of the city (the Historic City) with newer growth areas in the Northern Range. The plan should also address how to overcome the barriers created by roads and railroads.
- **City Image:** The community's image and reputation continues to be a very important issue to people. Most people agree that Commerce City's image has improved considerably in the past 10 years, as it has transitioned from a historically industrial community to a full-service, balanced community. The plan should help the city continue to define and establish an overall image—as it continues its transition.

- **Jobs/Commercial/Housing Balance:** The plan should help the city achieve balanced land uses and a compatible mix of development (to create great neighborhoods, services, jobs, compatible neighboring airport uses, and a fiscally sustainable community). It should also allow some flexibility to respond to market demand. The “balance” issue is especially relevant in the E-470 and Northern Range area as it builds out. Also, east-west corridors in the Northern Range Area need commercial services. Finally, for the plan to be successful, it should help the city avoid divisive land uses that might be incompatible with neighborhoods.
- **Amount and Location of Growth:** The plan should determine whether the long-term rate, amount, type, and location of growth occurring and planned will be beneficial to the community. Questions to address include: Should any lands be identified as a “future planning area”? How can the city and developments appropriately time and fund the provision of infrastructure? How should the city accommodate or grow around county enclaves and rural development areas?
- **Neighborhood/Industrial Conflicts:** Because of the proximity of residential and industrial areas, some conflicts occur. The plan should identify neighborhood structure and “edges” between industrial areas and neighborhoods (e.g. Derby and areas south near I-270 and unincorporated neighborhoods, such as Monaco).
- **Community Assets:** Commerce City has many assets—both within the community and nearby. The plan should integrate and take advantage of these assets, including: Denver International Airport (DIA) (possible future north entrance), the Refuge (multiple future entrances and recreation opportunities), existing large industrial areas, proximity to downtown Denver, events and festivals at the stadium, vacant lands with growth potential, and other assets and opportunities.
- **Airport Compatibility:** The proximity of DIA is both an asset and a challenge for the community. The airport will grow over time, expecting six additional runways at build out, more air traffic, and additional noise. The airport noise contours extend beyond the DIA boundaries and must be taken into consideration when planning for Commerce City. The community and airport should work together to resolve potential conflicts.
- **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space:** Commerce City residents generally view the parks system favorably. The plan should help the city maintain its current parks Level of Service and strive to expand the parks, recreation, and open space system to better serve the community’s Northern Range as growth occurs (given limited funding and need for private contributions). The plan should also help identify ways to conserve water (e.g., could golf course be irrigated with non-potable water?).
- **Community Structure:** Does the city need a “downtown” or multiple “centers”? The planning effort can help the city determine what type of structure, if any, is necessary for the community to become sustainable. Could the area around the Civic Center become an entertainment/restaurant district?

## **Community Issues**

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The Comprehensive Plan should address the following Community Issues:

- **Diverse Population/Housing:** The rapid socioeconomic diversification of the population makes it necessary to address differences, find common values, and address how to plan suitable housing stock for the current and future population.
- **Public Safety:** The dispersed geographic nature of the city makes it difficult to provide equal service levels in all parts of the community. The plan could explore whether decentralizing police facilities to improve response time and community public safety is a good idea to improve response times. In addition, the plan can explore ways to work with fire districts to improving funding and services, and consider possible integration of some services of fire, police, and Emergency Medical Service (EMS).
- **Poverty:** The city has high poverty levels, as being addressed through the Community Profile report. The plan should address ways to decrease poverty levels and increase the presence of middle- and higher-income households.
- **Sustainable, Healthy Community Initiative:** The plan should continue the present focus on livability, walkability, energy-efficiency, and fiscal sustainability.
- **Preserving History and Culture:** The plan should help the community identify and preserve these attributes.
- **Educational Opportunities:** While the city does not build, maintain, or operate school facilities, it does coordinate on their location. The plan could identify opportunities or needs for educational facilities (i.e., a community college in the north has been suggested).

## **Economic Development and Fiscal Issues**

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The Comprehensive Plan should address the following Economic Development and Fiscal Issues:

- **Bold Economic Development Plan:** The city does not have an economic development strategy; however, many have identified this as a clear need and would like to see the city chart its future in a unique way.
- **Growth and Diversification Opportunities:** The plan should address opportunities for diverse economic development activities related to traditional employment centers, Denver International Airport, and the E-470 and I-76 corridors, and sustainable “green” technology and energy-related development.
- **Adapting Redevelopment:** The plan should help determine how redevelopment of older industrial areas can adapt to accommodate current/future employment and residential needs.
- **Reinvestment in Older Neighborhoods:** The city’s older neighborhoods are poised for redevelopment due to their location and proximity to assets mentioned above. The city should seek ways to stimulate reinvestment in these older housing areas and neighborhoods

to increase Commerce City's competitiveness as a place for workers to live also. Leverage public and private investment; identify tools for city to make it happen.

- **City Financing Strategy:** The plan is an opportunity to develop a strategy allowing Commerce City to be financially sustainable for the long-term. The plan must also recognize that the city has a large backlog of infrastructure needs that are unfunded.
- **Industrial Cluster Strategy and Locations:** The plan could identify industrial clusters (e.g., What does Commerce City want for the future and what will the market support? What are the infrastructure and land needs to support the strategy? What is Commerce City's regional position?) Some possibilities include: Incubator Energy Technology, Energy districts, well-positioned industrial parks, and starting industries.

## **Transportation Issues**

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The Comprehensive and Transportation Plans should address the following issues:

- **Comprehensive Transportation/Multiple Modes:** The plan(s) should establish a comprehensive transportation framework to address all future modes of travel—vehicles, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. The city needs guidelines and schedule to evaluate timing of improvements, priorities and the city's financial share (e.g., bridge), given shortage of funding from Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT).
- **Improved Local Way-finding and Safety:** The city is in need of improved connections, way-finding, and local street and sidewalk connectivity. Derby is one of the neighborhoods where these needs are evident (e.g., for sidewalks, trails, driveways). The plan(s) should simultaneously address local way-finding needs and land use and address appropriate truck routes. Some locations that need improvements, including (but are not limited to): 104<sup>th</sup> and Tower, Tower Road on the south end, and South along Highway 2. Roadways under 104<sup>th</sup> should be addressed.
- **Regional Coordination:** The Transportation Plan should be coordinated with the regional transportation system, plan for growth areas, and identify new transportation infrastructure. It will require collaboration with regional entities, including DIA, E470, CDOT, RTD, and USFW, to identify and plan for a similar vision. Residents perceive that sometimes other agencies affect the image or economic development potential of Commerce City, such as Highway 2, or potential realignment of I-70. The plan should identify how to work together to avoid negative road corridor image and improve safety.
- **Transit Strategy:** The plan can help the city develop a long-term transit strategy (20-30 years) and ensure the Commerce City FasTracks station is built in the location most suitable for the south part of the community.
- **Trails:** The Refuge and future trail connections around and through present an opportunity for the city. Some residents have noted a desired to pave the perimeter trail to allow it to function as a bike commuting route as well as for recreation. The plan should identify how to connect trails around, to, and through the Refuge.

## Other Issues

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Other general issues for the plan to address include:

- **Decentralizing and co-locating public safety facilities:** The plan can help identify how to leverage funding, facilities, and staffing to be as efficient and effective as possible with parks, recreation, senior center, and police and public safety (e.g., could fire and police be united in parks operations?). Most of the city's resources are in the Historic City, but some could be co-located in the north in the future. The city should coordinate with schools to achieve mutual goals.
- **Coordinated Utilities:** The plan should help develop a long-term strategy and framework for public utilities and facilities (non-transportation infrastructure), including coordinating long-term water, sewer, etc. Coordinate to reduce fragmented infrastructure: medical, fire, police, schools, and citywide level of service. Technology needs to be considered a utility (e.g., broadband service along E-470).
- **Fire response:** While not a city service, the three fire districts' ability to serve growth will continue to be strained as the city grows. The plan should identify the city's role and shared responsibilities as growth occurs and address viability of volunteer staffing to meet future needs.
- **Balance of Foundation Fundamentals and Cutting-Edge Plan:** Create a bold plan with new big ideas incorporating common direction and considering market realities (and the economic development piece will fill in.) Recognize the city must address its fundamentals first through the plan, without losing sight of opportunities to prepare a cutting-edge plan that makes the community a leader. The consultant team should research other communities and how they have found the right balance, while following a bold plan.

## Some Initial Big Ideas - Brainstorm

Plan might include ideas such as:

- ✓ Communication and infrastructure
- ✓ Transit planning
- ✓ Bold but achievable concepts – a strategic plan.
- ✓ Long term stability (recognizing economic realities) and sustainability of the plan
- ✓ A grass-roots plan that is community driven.
- ✓ How did other communities stay the course? (e.g. Westminster)
- ✓ Stable financial future with good framework and leadership continuity.
- ✓ Assets: (Industrial base, refuge, transportation network, DIA, financial stability, land to grow, stadium festivals)
- ✓ Compact infrastructure that resists sprawl.
- ✓ E-470 Potential industrial (DIA) (Note: Some envision E470 as another Tech Center corridor, but others in region have capacity for cargo or transportation-related businesses, such as Dallas Fort Worth. This might be a good example. Future non-stop flights to Asia could be an asset for market distribution sales and potential for "International Trade Zone.")
- ✓ Education-Higher education-High School/ vocational
- ✓ Large area/ Market Opportunities
- ✓ Timing of infrastructure can be used for development phasing.