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Matthew Alcuran
Planning and Development
City of Colorado Springs
30 S. Nevada Ave., Suite 701
Colorado Springs, CO 80903

January 4, 2020

Re: CPC CU 20-00104, Outlook Briargate

Dear Mr. Alcuran:

By way of introduction my name is Carlos Perez and my family and I have lived in Briargate for nearly 27 years. I have an interest in the proposed Outlook Briargate development project and wish for the project to succeed. The sustained effort that citizens have made over the years and decades to make our city a vibrant and desirable place to live in is precisely the reason why out-of-state developers are attracted to our city and are seeking to expand here.

Generally speaking, I support this type of infill development. It helps provide housing for a growing population, transforms a dying auto-dependent shopping mall and a blighted parking lot into a place for people, and if designed properly can contribute positively to the activity center that is the North Academy Blvd retail corridor.

Despite the name, it is worth noting that this development does not fall under the purview of the Briargate Master Plan but because of its proximity it will have some impact on the mature Briargate neighborhoods to the east. The aphorism that “the devil is in the details” applies here.

I have reviewed the documents on the planning department's website and the project, as proposed, is **non-conformant** with the typologies and strategies of PlanCOS City Comprehensive Plan in at least three areas: Vibrant Neighborhoods, Strong Connections, and Majestic Landscapes.

Vibrant Neighborhoods. PlanCOS declares that “every person in the city deserves to live in a great neighborhood.” It further notes to “embrace creative infill” and to “Focus on Corridors and Centers” so that “for Colorado Springs to continue to flourish and grow, we need other places to function as centers for community life.” This development will eventually join and become integrated with the greater Briargate neighborhood. Nothing in the proposed plan indicates it will have neighborhood community gathering rooms, “third space” places, or special event venues for food trucks or farmers markets. The project should contribute to the fabric of the neighborhood and not merely exist as an isolated, gated apartment complex of transient residents with nothing in common (except our valuable name) with our schools, parks, and locally-owned small businesses. New and old residents alike deserve better and we ought to do better.

Worth repeating is that this site was never intended to accommodate new residents. The future of Chapel Hills Mall is uncertain (it was once under bankruptcy). As this area is revitalized by private developers and transitions into something different, special care must be taken to ensure that it is designed and built in a way that fits with the existing neighborhood and becomes a welcome addition to Northeast Colorado Springs.

Strong Connections. One of the most common complaints by Briargate residents is the level of motorized vehicle traffic that is caused by the automobile-oriented development pattern. The City recognizes this issue and the good news is we have a plan to address it. PlanCOS states “As the built areas of our city increase, a focus on connecting all modes of transportation will become important to create a livable and accessible city.”

PlanCOS envisions a “full choice-based transit system” and “we intend to achieve this vision in targeted and strategic sites.” The Outlook Briargate site is an excellent candidate for such a site. It is situated adjacent to the North Academy Blvd transit corridor on Mountain Metropolitan Transit routes 25 and 39 and near the Voyager Pkwy transit station. However, the developers do not avail themselves of the existing transit system and neglect to provide a safe, comfortable, and useful walking or bicycling “first mile” routes from the development to the nearby transit stops (such a path could also serve as a dual-use connection with the Craigin Rd bicycle route that feeds into the Pikes Peak Greenway). It need not be “transit oriented development” as some forward-thinking cities are doing, but it should not be completely indifferent to the needs of residents who are looking to have more mobility choices either.

I wish to specifically address the objections the applicant makes in a review letter dated 12/21/2020. They argue “The development cannot easily accommodate additional pedestrian walk connections to the public ROW adjacent to the site primarily because we’d have to cross multiple private properties that we don’t control.” Perhaps it won’t be “easy.” If the planners visit the site they can plainly see that the Chapel Hills retail area— with its ocean of parking lots and drive-thrus— is a degraded brownfield site hostile to the needs of pedestrians and people with disabilities. This is because the mall and Academy Blvd was originally designed for cars, not for people. The applicant asserts that the Balkanization of land ownership prevents them from doing anything about its obsolescence. I disagree. There appears to be sufficient underdeveloped drainageways, sidewalks, and medians that surround the property that could be upgraded. The City should solicit independent and unbiased second opinions from ADA and urban walkability experts who specialize in these types of retrofits and not rely solely on the assessment of the applicant.

Majestic Landscapes. Advocating that we should “provide parks for the people,” PlanCOS states “As it is essential to our community life, we need to ensure access to a variety of well-maintained parks, open spaces, trails, and outdoor venues. We expect our City to be the primary, but certainly not the only, provider of these important spaces, places, and facilities.” In other words, developers of infill projects are expected to contribute to our inventory of parks and greenspaces to offset the increase in residents and not rely solely on the City to provide them after the fact. The City is currently contemplating reducing the amount of parkland dedication for new development from 7.5 acres per 1,000 residents to 5.5 acres per 1,000 residents. Regardless of the amount, parkland should not be zero or nice landscaping offered as a substitute.

The Park System Master Plan (2014) contains a “parks and open space gap analysis” and has found that the commercial districts on North Academy Blvd are unique from the rest of the city in that they lie 1 to 2 miles from the nearest parks. According to the Parks Master Plan, “these areas, particularly the Briargate area in the northeast of the city and a small pocket of homes in the Woodman Valley, are underserved in terms of walkable access to parks and open space.” There are opportunities to remedy this issue as we transform an underutilized retail mall into a residential housing project, specifically, the construction of one or more pocket parks or linear parks that can serve as natural respites in a busy urban environment. The City and developer should work together to build a trail with wayfinding components to the Skyline Trail ½ mile to the east. This trail connects with Rampart Park and the east-west Woodmen Trail. Simply adding 300 residential units in what is effectively a hole in our parks and trails system— and expecting residents to drive elsewhere to access them— would be a

significant step backwards and contravenes the intent of PlanCOS and the Parks Master Plan to create more accessible natural spaces as our city grows.

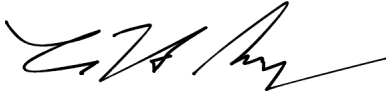
What follows are strategies from PlanCOS that seem to be applicable to this project. I request that the City planners and developers do not seek waivers, variances, or exemptions from our recently enacted comprehensive plan. The list below is not intended to be an exhaustive list but a starting point for further work.

Vibrant Neighborhoods
Strategy VN-3.A-4: Modify City Code and create incentives to encourage redevelopment of underperforming buildings to include higher-density housing, mixed-use, civic services, gathering areas, and additional employment opportunities.
Strategy VN-3.B-3: Encourage walkable civic, retail, and community gathering places as design elements within neighborhood centers.
Strategy VN-3.C-1: Assign land use designations and implement zoning to support and facilitate neighborhood activity centers within walking or biking distance of residential areas.
Strategy VN-3.E-2: Encourage vertical mixed-use design in neighborhood focal points along with neighborhood design meant to encourage a sense of community and provide a walkable environment. Vertical developments, where the various uses are “stacked” on top of each other, are typically used in areas with limited space, while larger sites allow those different components to be built next to each other—such as an apartment building adjacent to a grocery store.
Strategy VN-3.F-1: Increase transportation and recreation choices for all neighborhoods by improving or adding bike lanes, sidewalks, off-street neighborhood trails, and greenways that connect to larger system trails with associated wayfinding/signage.

Strong Connections
Strategy SC-1.A-6: Focus planning and design attention on the transportation hubs and other elements that provide for safe and convenient interconnections between modes.
Strategy SC-1.A-8: Design land uses and transportation improvements with an emphasis on “first and last mile” trips having desirable and safe options for non-motorized travel.
Strategy SC-1.D-1: Encourage well-connected system of streets, sidewalks, bike facilities, and off-system trails in areas defined by Recent Suburban (Typology 3) and by Future Streets (Typology 4) typologies for new developments and redevelopments areas.
Strategy SC-1.D-6: Continue to coordinate bicycle and pedestrian planning, design, and implementation with other infrastructure projects and land use decisions. Specifically, coordinate implementation among elements of the Intermodal Transportation Plan, the Bicycle Master Plan, as well as Parks and Trails Master Plan.
Strategy SC-1.G-8: Design safe pedestrian crossings along major arterials that are coordinated with transit stop locations.

Majestic Landscapes
Strategy ML-1.C-1: Establish, design, and implement a network of connected trail, open space, and park facilities within a maximum 10-minute walk or 1/2 mile distance from most homes and businesses.
Strategy ML-1.C-2: Encourage installation and maintenance of trails with wayfinding to allow for pedestrian and bicycle-friendly connectivity to local parks, outdoor places, open spaces, and regional trail networks.
Strategy ML-1.C-6: Focus on closing physical gaps and addressing challenging crossings within the existing and planned Tier 1 and Tier 2 trail system.
Strategy ML-2.A-4: Activate spaces in parks and trails with regularly occurring events such as farmer's markets, food trucks, educational events, tours, and cultural festivals that build community and provide market opportunities.
Strategy ML-2.C-1: Align City and new private development investments in parks, open space, and trails with a focus on providing access within a 10 minute or 1/2 mile walk for residents and business users.
Strategy ML-2.C-2: While maintaining a city-wide focus on progress toward Strategy ML- 2.C-1, also identify and support opportunities to increase the proportion of community residents and businesses within a 1/4 mile walking distance of parks, trails, open space and other publically accessible outdoor spaces and amenities.
Strategy ML-2.C-3: Maximize opportunities for citywide and non-exclusive access to linear and linked open space systems with convenient non-motorized connection.
Strategy ML-2.C-4: De-emphasize reliance on a single standard for both the size and program for neighborhood parks (e.g. 5 acres) in favor of options for facilities of different sizes and programs.
Strategy ML-2.C-5: Coordinate with local developers and private interests to construct and maintain pocket parks with higher density Unique Places.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please put me on your email list for project updates.



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