



## **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

1. **Project Description:** This is a request to establish the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Area within the Lowell Neighborhood on the southeastern edge of Downtown Colorado Springs. Prior to City Council action, the City's Planning Commission must determine that the proposed Urban Renewal Plan for the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Area conforms with the City of Colorado Springs 2019 Comprehensive Plan (Plan COS).

This application proposes to combine multiple vacant parcels in the Lowell PUD area into a new urban renewal area. The proposal for the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Plan is attached (**Figure 1 - Urban Renewal Plan**). There are three main areas in the Lowell PUD that are associated with this proposal: Draper Commons' Bristow House, Draper Commons' Sumner House, and Lowell Commons. Draper Commons is located on the southeast corner of the site and is comprised of two projects that are separated by a rail spur. The southeastern property in this proposed URA is Draper Commons' Bristow House, which is a proposed 185-unit affordable housing building on 5.15 acres. This proposed project is currently under administrative review for a development plan and a new plat. Located just west of Bristow House, Draper Commons' Sumner House is a 95-unit affordable housing project situated on 1.55 acres and has a recently approved development plan. The last three parcels of this proposed URA area make up the 1.2-acre Lowell Commons which is located one block north on S. Weber St. and Las Animas. No entitlement applications have been submitted to date for the Lowell Commons parcels. The three plan subareas are connected via South Weber St. and Fountain Blvd. connect the three areas of the proposed Lowell-Draper URA area and create one unified district. In total, all of the parcels with connecting right-of-way constitute approximately 11.35 acres.

2. **Planning and Development Team's Recommendation:** Staff recommends that the City's Planning Commission finds conformity between the proposed Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Plan and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

## **BACKGROUND:**

1. **Site Address:** 202, 251 & 252 Las Animas, 335 Victoria St, 405 Writers Way, parcel address 019-14-66, 0 19-14-66, & 0 Santa Fe St.
2. **Existing Zoning/Land Use:** The subject properties are zoned PUD (Planned Unit Development) and are currently vacant.
3. **Surrounding Zoning/Land Use:**
  - North:** PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoned properties occupied by residential townhomes and apartments. To the north of Lowell Commons, there is a parking garage and police headquarters zoned PF (Public Facility).
  - South:** PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoned properties occupied by residential townhomes and apartments within the PUD. One parcel to the south of Lowell Commons is zoned OC (Office Complex) and is the headquarters of the Colorado Springs Housing Authority. South of Bristow House is the Concrete Coyote property, an arts organization.
  - East:** PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoned properties occupied by residential townhomes and apartments within the PUD zone. Across S. Wahsatch Ave. there is a rail corridor which abuts Shooks Run and is designated a PK (Park Land) zone.
  - West:** PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoned properties occupied by residential townhomes and apartments within the PUD. Across S. Nevada Ave., a mixed-use neighborhood is zoned FBZ-T1 (Form-Based Zone-Transition Sector 1).

4. PlanCOS Vision: Per the PlanCOS Vision Map (**Figure 2 – PlanCOS Vision Map**), the subject site is identified as being a Mature/Redeveloping area of Downtown Colorado Springs. Please see the staff analysis provided below for further detail and applicability.
5. Annexation: Town of Colorado Springs - 1872.
6. Master Plan/Designated Master Plan Land Use: Imagine Downtown Colorado Springs 2009 – Mixed Use area.
7. Subdivision: Unplatted land (Draper Commons – Bristow House), Lowell Sub #3 (Draper Commons – Sumner House), and Poet Lofts Sub (Lowell Commons)
8. Zoning Enforcement Action: No recent code enforcement items were found. Neighboring properties and part of the Bristow property had a homeless camp removed in 2018. To clear these properties of the illegal camp, City crews filled 108 truckloads with garbage.
9. Physical Characteristics: Most of the site is flat and vacant with low vegetation. The southeast corner of the property slopes steeply towards Shooks Run and the neighboring property to the south and east (Concrete Coyote).

#### **STAKEHOLDER PROCESS AND INVOLVEMENT:**

Per standard protocol for URA area determinations, this application was not distributed to the usual City reviewers. Postcards were sent out to property owners with-in 1000 feet of the property, but posters were not placed on the properties. The URA does require a letter to the owner once a blight study is commissioned. In addition, they are required to have a notice in the paper 30 days prior to City Council's final hearing.

#### **ANALYSIS OF REVIEW CRITERIA; MAJOR ISSUES AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CONFORMANCE**

1. Application Summary:

As mentioned above in the project description section of this report, this application is being processed to combine three areas in the Lowell Neighborhood (Draper Commons' Bristow House, Draper Commons' Sumner House, and Lowell Commons) into a new Urban Renewal Area with an approximate total area of 11.35 acres.

2. Approval of an Urban Renewal Designation:

Urban renewal authorities, urban renewal plans and the use of tax increment financing (TIF) are regulated by CRS (Colorado Revised Statutes) Title 31, Article 25. The intent of an urban renewal designation is to encourage and facilitate redevelopment and eliminate blight within the selected area. To be approved by the City, the designation must be found to conform with the goals and policies of the City's comprehensive plan. For the purpose of this discussion regarding urban renewal designation, a "blighted area" is defined in CRS 31-25-103-2. In order for an area to be classified as blighted, it must exhibit 4 of 12 possible characteristics stipulated in CRS. A "blight conditions survey" that was taken of this area, concluded that these parcels do, in fact, qualify as a "blighted area". The conditions survey for Lowell-Draper URA area is attached (**see Figure #3 - "URA Conditions Survey"**).

In accordance with CRS 31-25-107(2), prior to City Council approval of an urban renewal plan or a substantial amendment to an existing plan, the plan or amendment must first be reviewed and a recommendation offered by the City Planning Commission regarding its conformity to the City Comprehensive Plan.

The adoption of the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Plan allows the Colorado Springs Urban Renewal Authority (CSURA), among other powers, to enact property tax and sales

tax increment financing to assist with the financing of infrastructure and site remediation requirements necessary to eliminate and prevent the spread of blighted conditions in the area for a full 25-year period.

3. Comprehensive Plan/Master Plan Conformance:

This area is governed by the Imagine Downtown Colorado Springs Master Plan (2009), which has largely been replaced by the Experience Downtown Colorado Springs Master Plan (2016), except in a few outlying areas such as the Lowell Neighborhood. As a result, the 2009 Master Plan is still considered the operative plan for the area. Even though the 2016 Master Plan's boundaries do not include the Lowell area, whenever a significant project is proposed, it is still reviewed for conformity. The proposed Urban Renewal Area is consistent with both the 2009 and 2016 master plans for this area.

Evidence of support for this project can be found in both masterplans. The 2009 Imagine Downtown Colorado Springs Master Plan strongly supports this type of residential development. The first objective listed in the Lowell Neighborhood section of the plan states: Expand residential uses, particularly multi-family, senior housing, lower income and subsidized housing. The Lowell-Draper URA designation would bring this objective closer to fruition.

The 2016 Experience Downtown Colorado Springs Master Plan, though it does not include the Lowell Neighborhood within its boundaries, the plan does mention the neighborhood and how it is a "influence site" for the downtown and should be "treated with similar priority to core sites." The plan supports "affordable housing" in this neighborhood and prescribes in the plan's second goal "diverse and inclusive place to live integrated with adjacent neighborhoods." Action items under this goal include:

1. Support and incentivize construction of at least 1,000 new residential units by 2020, and 2,000 total by 2025.
2. Promote public policies that are supportive of urban living and the development of urban residential product.
3. Lead a cohesive strategy to grow workforce and affordable housing opportunities both within and easily accessible to Downtown, while continuing to comprehensively plan in surrounding urban neighborhoods.

Planning Staff believes that the proposed URA designation for the aforementioned parcels of the Lowell Neighborhood also conform with the City's current comprehensive plan, PlanCOS. Most notably, PlanCOS promotes "Housing for All," which supports the plan's attainable housing goal and is further articulated in HomeCOS. The three development areas of the proposed Lowell-Draper URA will all offer some type of affordable/attainable housing which is in strong demand in Colorado Springs.

Per PlanCOS, the project site and its surrounding area is identified on the Vision Map of PlanCOS as a Mature/Redeveloping area of Downtown Colorado Springs. While there are vacant parcels left within the general area surrounding the subject site, all but two of the parcels have approved development plans associated with them.

Below are a number of PlanCOS Goals and Policies which the Planning and Community Development Department Staff believe would be borne out with approval of this project:

- **“Housing for All”:** This project conforms well with the City’s housing diversity and attainability goals.
- **“Reclaim Neighborhood Space”:** This project is a reinvestment in an existing neighborhood with a potential for decline.
- **“Be a City of Places”:** Lowell neighborhood was conceived over 20 years ago as a livable neighborhood close to downtown. With the addition of these three areas and the development of the surrounding vacant lots that have approved development plans, this neighborhood will attract businesses and residents seeking both a neighborhood feel along with proximity to downtown.
- **Embrace Creative Infill, Adaptation and Land Use Change:** The Bristow House property has as much as 25’ of uncontrolled fill (it was once a dumping ground for the previous industrial use). Development of a property with such complexities has necessitated creative problem solving.
- **Focus on Corridors and Centers:** This project is located in the heart of Colorado Springs and the City should support projects such as these that will further strengthen its core as well as South Nevada Avenue, one of the main corridors leading into downtown.
- **Goal VN-2 (Vibrant Neighborhoods):** Strive for a diversity of housing types, styles, and price points distributed throughout the city through a combination of supportive development standards, community partnerships, and appropriate zoning and density that is adaptable to market demands and housing needs.
- **Goal VN-3:** Through neighborhood plans, associations, and partnerships, empower neighborhoods to reinvest in order to create community, vibrancy, and to address their specific vision and needs.
- **Goal UP-2 (Unique Places):** Embrace thoughtful, targeted, and forward-thinking changes in land use, infill, reinvestment, and redevelopment to respond to shifts in demographics, technology, and the market.
- **Policy UP-2. A:** Support infill and land use investment throughout the mature and developed areas of the city.
- **Strategy UP-2. A-1:** Encourage the development or redevelopment of vacant properties in the core area of the city by using a combination of incentives, rezoning, and creative design solutions.
- **Goal UP-3:** Continue to grow and support Downtown as an inclusive, mixed use, cultural, and economic heart of the region.
- **Policy UP-4. D:** Leverage funding tools, partnerships, and policies to fund and maintain redevelopment centers, corridors, and gateways.

- **Strategy UP-4. D-3:** Proactively involve the Urban Renewal Authority in identifying infill and redevelopment opportunities and targeting public infrastructure investments.”

Staff finds that the proposed Urban Renewal Plan for the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Area conforms with the goals, policies and strategies of PlanCOS.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

#### **CPC URBAN RENEWAL AREA PLAN**

Recommend to City Council that the Lowell-Draper Urban Renewal Area conforms with PlanCOS, the city’s comprehensive plan, based upon the findings contained in this Staff report.