

## Report on the Community Meeting to identify a community vision of the Mesa area.

On February 9, over 60 people attended a meeting to discuss a vision for the Mesa Road/Fillmore/Centennial area. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were residents of the immediate area, with another third residing elsewhere in the City.

The goal of the community meeting was to determine the character of the Mesa area and those elements that should be preserved, and how development could be managed to preserve and enhance that character and appearance.

### Summary of Meeting Conclusions

- The Mesa is unique and highly visible throughout the city and is a critical element of the mountain backdrop, the foothills which are the gateway to Pikes Peak and the Garden of the Gods, and the viewshed to Pikes Peak.
- Development should be limited in scale and height. Structures should be low profile and integrated into the natural surroundings. High rise development is not appropriate on the Mesa. Projects should use natural materials for external construction.
- The Mesa has natural creeks, drainage, trails, open space, views and ridgelines that are integral to the character of the Mesa which should be preserved and not be negatively impacted by development.
- Chapter 6 requires that development complement and not change an area's natural setting, character and value to the community. To achieve that balance, development on the Mesa requires thoughtful, unique and creative designs.
- The players in the planning process need to follow the rules. The developer and planning department are required by the city code to address the provisions of Chapter 6 of the Comprehensive Plan. That requires them to critically examine and analyze the project based on the community vision for the Mesa and the Objectives, Policies and Strategies of Chapter 6 and the design guidelines of the hillside ordinance. The Planning Commission and City Council need to determine whether the project conforms to those provisions of Chapter 6 before it can approve a change to the zoning code or approve a development plan.
- The community should be involved in a proposed project at the earliest possible time in the development process. The design and integration of a project into the Mesa should be a partnership between the developer and the community. Initial community meetings, broad notice to the community and multiple opportunities to exchange views and ideas should be required in the development process. The city should require and facilitate this partnership.

### Overview of Discussion

In general comments at the beginning of the meeting, it was clear that participants viewed the area as important to the overall community, particularly since it is sited in such a way as to have significant impact on the view to the west and Pikes Peak. Representative comments included:

- Use the natural environment to influence development
- Set buildings into and under the ridge line, or closer to the Fillmore/Centennial shopping area

- Don't block or detract from the view of Pikes Peak
- Protect wildlife habitat

Several mentioned that the City should follow its own rules, particularly regarding the public notification of all those to be affected, not simply within the 500-1000 foot area surrounding proposed development, and paying special attention to Chapter 6 of the City Comprehensive Plan.

Following general discussion, participants broke into eight small groups and addressed three questions:

***What are the critical elements to preserve on the Mesa?***

Comments fell into several categories:

*Natural features -*

Protect creek and drainage; protect trails and open space; maintain green space; maintain water quality and drainage; protect views and respect ridge line.

*Design elements -*

The overall feel now is valuable; preserve what it looks like; develop design restrictions; use natural materials for exterior construction; recognize the area as of photographic and scenic interest; moderate density; limit scale and height; build projects that "fade into the natural surroundings"; buildings should be low-profile

*Usage -*

Preserve hiking access; preserve trails; keep trails usable and accessible; encourage low traffic; protect bike lanes; keep businesses off Mesa Road; recognize area as a portal to Garden of the Gods and Glen Eyrie.

Others suggested the importance of completing Centennial to the south; revitalizing run-down properties; and "getting it right the first time."

***What is the community interest in the Mesa?***

There was common agreement that the Mesa area is unique and highly visible throughout the City. As development of the Mesa area proceeds, notification of proposed development should be provided very broadly.

Other comments: The area provides a necessary transition from downtown to the Garden of the Gods; without a satisfactory vision for development of the Mesa, we put tourism at risk; applications to develop the area should be required to address the viewshed; it is important to preserve what we have now in the area; development plans should address existing character of the area, be complementary in scale, blend into the natural environment, and use natural materials indigenous to the area. Resurfacing of Centennial was also encouraged.

***How should we manage development on the Mesa?***

There was a great deal of consensus that the City planning department, the Planning Commission, and City Council should both follow the existing process and ascertain the community vision with regard to

the Mesa. Doing so was considered much more important than simply "checking boxes" and meeting zoning requirements. Developers should be accountable to this community vision as well. The planning and approval process should encourage developers to embrace a creative vision, and integrate their projects--through design, scale, character, and usage--into the environment. Developers should approach the neighborhoods first, before submitting projects for approval. The public process should be more inclusive and extensive at the beginning stages.

Other comments included: Compliance with Chapter 6 of the City Comprehensive Plan is very important; geological hazards must be considered and avoided; retain low profile (flat roof) single-family housing typical of Mesa Road; abide by the hillside overlay zone; revise and enforce the hillside design manual; protect and enhance natural species; encourage walkability within the area; effectively manage/mitigate the existing dump site; preserve access to Sonderman Park; protect against light pollution; ensure that commercial zoning has consistent and effective transitions to residences.

It was suggested that all future development proposals utilize existing technology to model full views, including line of sight and three-dimensional impacts.

As the meeting came to a close, discussion turned to what steps should be taken next. Consensus existed that more community meetings on this issue are important to formulate a vision of how the Mesa area should best be protected and developed. Additional meetings should focus on Chapter 6 of the City Comprehensive Plan; and broaden the conversation to encourage more participants from outside the Mesa area, particularly downtown. Mesa area residents intend to be more organized as coordinated neighborhoods who will more closely monitor proposed development, and will more consistently communicate with the Planning Commission and City Council.

It was suggested that it would be helpful if there were a single point of contact with the planning process and significant advance notice of public meetings on that process. Participants asked that the planning department include them on any future mailings about proposed and planned developments in the Mesa/Fillmore/Centennial area.

Finally, a number of participants urged all to attend the February 18 meeting of the Planning Commission.