



GOLDEN URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY

Memorandum

To: Downtown Character Committee
From: Mark Heller
Date: April 3, 2007
RE: Summary Analysis of Open House Comments

On February 25th and 26th, 2007, the Downtown Character Committee hosted Open Houses to obtain feedback from the community on several elements of a comprehensive re-thinking of downtown. This effort is a joint project of the Golden Urban Renewal Authority, and the City's Parks & Recreation Board, Historic Preservation Board, and Planning Commission. The goals of this effort are to revise the Golden Urban Renewal Plan, and create new planning documents to regulate the design and uses of downtown and the Clear Creek. These four organizations have been gathering ideas and information from a variety of sources over the past year, and the open house weekend was another opportunity to share this information with the public.

The Open Houses featured about a dozen large scale maps and photo collages, a digital visualization of awning options for downtown, a detailed description of the current planning documents relevant to downtown, an interactive design exercise for the Clear Creek Corridor, and four surveys. The surveys were designed to gain feedback on citizens' covered walkway/awning preferences, streetscape impressions, what kinds of businesses and other amenities were desired for downtown, and redevelopment and preservation priorities for downtown and Clear Creek; and the usefulness of the open house itself. Over 70 people attended the open houses. Their input follows.

Businesses

We received 27 ideas for restaurants that attendees felt would be good in Golden. The most common suggestions included breakfast, fast casual and family dining options, and more Asian cuisine restaurants such as Thai, Japanese, or Indian. There was also a large group of Open House attendees who indicated they would like a bookstore in Downtown Golden. There were also many suggestions for specific retail businesses that people would like to see in

Downtown Golden, including practical clothing stores, children's stores, office supplies, a wine shop, and shoe stores.

One survey question asked, "Would you shop in Downtown Golden if most stores were open on Sundays?" Eighty percent of respondents said yes. Additionally, seventy percent said they would shop in Downtown Golden on weekend nights if most stores were open.

While there is strong support for enabling the success of local, independent businesses, others suggested the need for striking a balance between independent stores and chains. Some offered that national chains could be acceptable as long as they are held to design standards and zoning requirements. There is an emphasis on making sure the businesses fit with Golden's character. The theme of balance extended to the goods sold within the businesses. For example, one person commented, "Balance anchor stores with independent businesses. If possible, favor the independent businesses. Balance expensive boutiques with cheap shops. Variety is best."

Streetscape

Most people surveyed like the planters on Washington Ave. and they listed a variety of features that they like about them, including the flowers, trash receptacles, and seating. A majority of respondents (93%) expressed an interest in seeing the streetscape (sandstone planters, benches, trees, and streetlights) on Washington Ave. extended to other parts of Golden. The two most common areas suggested for this extension were south on Washington Ave. to 19th Street and east on 13th Street towards the Coors plant.

There are mixed feelings in the community about the covered walkways in Downtown Golden. While many people think they may need to be changed or redesigned, few people want them to be removed altogether. A group of survey respondents would like them to remain, but with the vertical columns removed. Another group would either like covered walkways to be totally removed or redesigned. There is not a strong consensus about the preferred solution. An online awning survey was conducted that displayed a variety images of glass, metal, fabric, and retractable awnings and then asked participants to rate them in terms of how well they fit with Downtown Golden. You can view the top three vote-getters at www.gura.com/awningresults.

Clear Creek

There seems to be a consensus that Clear Creek should be preserved as a greenway and not developed. Many Open House attendees expressed how much they enjoy the trails and having the green space so close to Downtown Golden. They view it as a unique community asset and wish to ensure its preservation. There is also a common desire to extend and connect the trails that run along the creek and improve access and connections to the trails. Some respondents suggested additional recreational amenities along the creek, such as an area to climb on boulders.

Cultural Resources and Tourism

There is a desire to build upon the cultural assets already in Golden. One of the more popular suggestion categories were for additional facilities such as a band shell, a small movie theater, music venues or jazz clubs, and a stage for poetry readings or open mic events. There is

also a strong desire to continue and expand the community events that are held in Downtown Golden. Several people suggested a monthly art walk, an art festival, more live music and outdoor concerts, and a longer season for the movies in the park series.

There were suggestions to improve the signs that mark downtown Golden's boundaries in order to draw in more visitors. Recommendations to support tourism including the continuation of free parking and making sure there is sufficient parking. Also, there were suggestions to market, promote, and continue the events that make Golden unique.

Environment

Although the focus of the Open Houses on February 25th and 26th did not include sustainability (that was the focus of the Open House held on February 28th at City Hall), there were still enough attendees interested in these issues to make it one of the frequent suggestion categories. Comments related to using renewable energy for City operations, mass transit, and as a business recruitment strategy. Others suggested energy efficiency, reduction of CO2 emissions, and improved recycling options.

Housing & Neighborhoods

The comments that related to housing addressed three themes: affordability, density, and a desire for letting "organic" growth happen. While "organic" was not defined, we assume it to mean growth without direct government subsidy or direction. In terms of affordability, one person commented, "I'm concerned about the affordability to live in Downtown Golden." However, there is some disagreement about this issue. Another person commented, "I feel that low income housing can't support the retail businesses with the high rents in Downtown Golden." Some comments on affordability mentioned the terms workforce housing and essential housing.

There is also some disagreement on the preferred density in Downtown. A few people conveyed distaste for the high density of new housing in Downtown Golden. However, others expressed an interest in promoting connections between retail and neighborhoods in order to support businesses. One person commented, "Increasing density downtown will help ensure vibrancy of businesses and more residential is critical."

Historic Preservation

Most people who commented on the architecture in Golden value the historic buildings. These people emphasized the importance of preserving this part of Downtown Golden's character and pointed out that Golden's history is what makes it unique from other towns. However, there is also a desire to thoughtfully blend new buildings in with the historic buildings.

Transportation and Pedestrian Amenities

One of the major themes that came out of the Open Houses related to alternative transportation and improving bike lanes and pedestrian paths. Suggestions included providing more connections, extensions, and access points. Attendees would like to see the trails adjacent

to Clear Creek extended. There is also a desire for improved transportation facilities, such as a local circulator like the former GUS BUS and for a new service that would connect Golden to the coming light rail terminus.

There was also many comments on widening sidewalks, maintaining trails, and improving pedestrian crosswalks at key intersections. Several people mentioned that the outdoor seating and smoking area outside Ace High is too wide and obstructs the pedestrian path.

Overall Comments & Suggestions for Improvements to Format

Nearly all those who completed the evaluation form were pleased with the effectiveness of the Open House and felt it better helped them understand the Downtown Character Plan process. One hundred percent of respondents indicated that they were able to speak directly with committee members. Some of the suggestions for improvement included utilizing online surveys more often, including the Colorado School of Mines community more effectively, and identifying committee members better with name tags or shirts so that they stand out from the crowd. Many people indicated they would like to see how their involvement and feedback impact the planning process.

Most Popular Suggestions

Of the 643 suggestions made by Open House attendees on the “post-it” boards, 336 (52.2%) represent categories receiving double-digit support. These are:

Votes	%	Suggestion
48	7.47%	Natural Food Stores: Vitamin Cottage; Golden Natural Market; Sunflower Market; Green Grocer
39	6.07%	Breakfast Café/Diner, reasonably priced, w/healthy options; non-chain; open Sundays; Family style
36	5.60%	Movie Theater; dollar theatre; small foreign/independent film theater
34	5.29%	Book Store; like Bookends in Boulder; like Hatches
31	4.82%	All purpose music venue: jazz, blues, folk, music/poet's stage; more music on sidewalks and parks
29	4.51%	More ethnic food - Japanese, Thai, Indian, Vietnamese, less Mexican
21	3.27%	Light rail, mass transit, eg, GUS Bus (renewable)
19	2.95%	Various landscape, streetscape, and creekscape improvement suggestions
18	2.80%	Various bicycle-related improvements.
27	4.20%	Various suggested restaurants
13	2.02%	Various suggested retail stores
11	1.71%	Small size permanent band shell
10	1.56%	Various renewable energy suggestions

The Downtown Character Committee will consider this input as it refines the drafts of the documents described above and as it continues its public outreach in the coming months.