

# CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION



**MEETING DATE:** February 16, 2021

**ITEM NUMBER:** 5.A

**SECOND READING:**

{{customfields.ResoOrdNumber}}

**TYPE OF ITEM:** Study Session

**PRESENTED BY:**

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**SUBJECT/AGENDA TITLE:**

Southeast Longmont Redevelopment and Planning Activity 2020 - 2021

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

In the latter part of 2018, the City Council adopted a work plan with the following vision statement: *"In 20 years, Longmont will have a developed Main Street from Pike Road to Highway 66, and a river corridor that stretches from the Sugar Mill to the Fairgrounds as a vibrant economic, residential, cultural and entertainment epicenter that is sustainable and respects the natural environment."* In association with this vision, the City Council directed Staff to initiate the Building S.T.E.A.M project with the purpose of articulating expectations and desires for development within the St. Vrain corridor and, thereafter, engaging in efforts and activities to implement plans accordingly. With an initial focus on the corridor between S. Pratt Parkway and Martin Street (Phase 1), the S.T.E.A.M project advanced throughout 2019 and concluded upon the creation of a land use/redevelopment vision along with a number of recommended next steps.

Concurrent with the S.T.E.A.M Phase-1 process, and throughout 2020, Staff has also been working on other projects that have a direct bearing on future development within the larger context of the S.T.E.A.M corridor. Amongst these efforts have been the following:

- Main Street Corridor Plan Implementation;
- 1<sup>st</sup> and Main Transit Station and Redevelopment;
- Longmont Performing Arts and Conference Center Feasibility Study;
- Resilient St. Vrain Project (RSVP); and,
- Longmont Sugar Mill Redevelopment



Moving forward into 2021 and 2022, the Planning and Redevelopment work programs will include a number of activities intended to continue moving the Building S.T.E.A.M project forward. These tasks are proposed to include:

- Compiling all findings and recommendations from S.T.E.A.M Phase-1 and Sugar Mill planning into cohesive high-level, subarea plan for Council approval;
- Calculating infrastructure needs and costs to include in the City's capital plan(s);
- Developing more detailed plans for multimodal transportation connectivity;
- Analyzing proposed land uses relative to market opportunity and strategizing phasing of development;
- Identifying regulatory, market and "physical" barriers to development; and
- Focusing on urban design and "place-making" through the preparation of an urban design plan and guidelines to implement the development vision(s).

**COUNCIL OPTIONS:**

No Action Required

**RECOMMENDED OPTIONS:**

No Action Required

**FISCAL IMPACT & FUND SOURCE FOR RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

\$150,000 has been carried over to fund additional planning and analysis to move the projects discussed in this communication forward.

**BACKGROUND AND ISSUE ANALYSIS:**

In late 2018, the Longmont City Council adopted a work plan that included a vision for Longmont that stated:

*"In 20 years, Longmont will have a developed Main Street from Pike Road to Highway 66, and a river corridor that stretches from the Sugar Mill to the Fairgrounds as a vibrant economic, residential, cultural and entertainment epicenter that is sustainable and respects the natural environment."*

In support of this vision, the Council work plan outlined a number of objectives and actions focusing on the St. Vrain Creek corridor, including:

- Adoption of a vision and implementation plan for the St. Vrain Creek Corridor;
- Completion of the Main Street Corridor Plan;
- Identification and assessment of redevelopment opportunity sites;

- Completion of a redevelopment vision and utilization/financing strategy for the Longmont Sugar Mill/Highway 119 Gateway Focus Area;
- Implementation of transit improvements and development at 1<sup>st</sup> and Main;
- Preparation of market and funding study to determine viability of constructing a performing arts center and conference facility;
- Preparation of a market and redevelopment assessment to assist in recruitment; and,
- Identification of higher education opportunities and targets for recruitment.

## **Planning Accomplishments 2019-2020**

With direction taken from the City Council work program, Staff has been working on several projects and activities to support the overall vision and objectives. These initiatives were included as part of the 2019 and 2020 Division work plans and are described in detail below.

### **Building S.T.E.A.M Project**

Upon adoption of the City Council work plan, Staff was instructed to proceed with a planning initiative, titled Building S.T.E.A.M, that would set forth a framework to create an epicenter of Science, Technology, Education, Arts and Mathematics along the St. Vrain Creek corridor. The S.T.E.A.M area is ultimately envisioned by the City Council to become the center of a vibrant economic, residential, cultural, and entertainment district that is sustainable and respects the natural environment. While the overall intent was to cover the entire St. Vrain corridor, from Hover Street on the west to the Longmont Sugar Mill to the east, an initial visioning effort (Phase 1) was limited to a sub-area bounded by South Pratt Parkway, 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, Martin Street, and the St. Vrain Creek.

The project was initiated in January 2019 when a community-based Advisory Group was convened. This group helped develop a vision for the subarea by brainstorming development types, character and general principles that should be pursued and implemented. The ideas generated included: higher density residential, and office and retail along Main Street, with an emphasis on vertical mixed use when feasible. Other unique uses included establishment of a campus of innovation and higher learning, and a performing arts and conference center.

Two additional Advisory Group meetings were conducted leading to a recommended number of actions to be undertaken in further pursuit of implementing the S.T.E.A.M vision. In addition, staff and Council conducted community outreach to gain additional perspectives for this area. Information on this effort, including the feedback received from the community, was shared with Council in October 2019.

The Advisory Group recommendations included:

- Adopt S.T.E.A.M goals and objectives w/ timelines;
- Update zoning and code requirements, as needed;
- Conduct transportation/connectivity masterplan studies to link this area to the broader community;
- Aggregate higher ED / Library / Maker space / Cultural & Performing Arts and consider a potential partnership with St. Vrain Valley School District, Front Range Community College, University of Colorado, and other higher educational institutions.
- Seek development partnerships & leverage relationships; and,
- Pursuit of a performing arts/conference center.

The COVID-19 pandemic diverted staff resources and impacted the timeline for continuing to work on the Building STEAM project; staff has continued to work on related items as time has allowed but is committed to refocusing resources on this important project in 2021.

### Main Street Corridor Plan Implementation

In the Spring of 2018, the City began working on a plan for the Main Street Corridor, from State Highway 66 on the north to Plateau Road on the south. A portion of the Main Street Corridor Plan study area overlaps the Building STEAM study area, so staff was able to conduct community outreach and coordinate the planning processes for these two efforts. The plan, accepted by Council in October 2019, focuses on land use, multimodal transportation, and market opportunities, among other items related to the Main Street Corridor. The plan contains a detailed implementation plan and suggested code revisions. Staff provided an informational update on this plan to City Council in December 2020.

While implementation of this plan was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, staff is planning to refocus on implementation in the coming year. Specifically, there is an opportunity to coordinate recommended implementation items, including code updates, with other projects already underway or being planned for 2021. This includes:

- More detailed subarea planning for the Downtown Character area (between 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. - 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. along Main St.), with the Building STEAM effort and the work of the Advance Longmont 2.0 PLACE working group.
- Implementation of specific corridor wide transportation recommendations in coordination with CDOT projects, the Coffman St. Corridor planning effort, the Hwy 287 corridor visioning project being led by Boulder County, the 1<sup>st</sup> & Main Transit Station project (see below), and specific development proposals currently being

reviewed throughout the corridor. The communication provided to Council in December provides additional detail on these items.

Continued coordination with development projects in the corridor including projects in the Midtown-, Downtown-, and South Main Character areas.

### 1st & Main Transit Station Project

The Transit Station project has been moving forward on several fronts. In 2020, Staff worked with RTD to finalize the required Infrastructure Master Plan (IMP) that sets forth the acquisitions and improvements needed to implement the Transit Facilities. Among the agreed to improvements are the construction of a combined bus facility and parking garage providing 200 parking spaces for RTD use. It was agreed that the garage could be increased in size, at cost to the City or a developer, to provide parking necessary to serve any adjacent development. The IMP also provides for installation of water, sanitary, storm and dry utility infrastructure and extending Coffman Street from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to Boston Avenue. Coffman Street is to be built to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation (i.e. bus, cars, pedestrian, bicycle, etc.) that will interconnect with the planned Coffman Street Busway and Multimodal project connecting from 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue north to 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Upon finalization of the IMP, these elements are to be incorporated into an IGA that will allow for the acquisitions and improvements to commence.

Simultaneous with preparation of the IMP, staff maintained a continuous dialog with a prospective developer interested in working in partnership with the City and the Longmont Urban Renewal Authority (LURA) to construct a mixed use project that would “wrap” the planned bus facility/parking garage. The developer has been actively attempting to purchase the property upon which to construct the RTD Transit Facility and the mixed use development.

### Performing Arts and Conference Center Feasibility Study

The City, Visit Longmont, and the Longmont Performing Arts Initiative (LPAI) partnered to have a feasibility study prepared by a consultant to determine the viability of constructing a performing arts center and conference center, either collectively or independent from one another. The land development vision established through the S.T.E.A.M Phase-1 process contemplates the development of a performing arts and conference center as a component of future redevelopment. Staff has been involved in providing information and participating in discussions with the Study consultant that has included the S.T.E.A.M site as a priority location.

### Resilient St. Vrain Project (RSVP) – Floodplain Mitigation

Channel improvements were completed in 2020 that resulted in a small portion of S.T.E.A.M-Phase 1 properties north of Boston Avenue being removed from the 100-year floodplain. In



conjunction with these improvements, the City submitted a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) to FEMA. Upon anticipated approval from FEMA in 2021, these properties will no longer be subject to floodplain regulation.

While the vast majority of property remains within the 100-year floodplain, the City also entered into an agreement with the U.S. Corp of Engineers to proceed with improvements to the Izaak Walton Ponds that will result in the remainder of the S.T.E.A.M-Phase 1 area being removed by the floodplain around 2023 or 2024.

Lastly, the final amenities were added to the Dickens Nature Area, opening up the area to community use. This area was tremendously popular throughout the summer of 2020.

### *Longmont Sugar Mill Redevelopment*

Staff reengaged in conversations with the owner of the Longmont Sugar Mill property, where the historic buildings are situated. Conversations have been productive and have led to the owner entertaining negotiations with a prospective developer to buy the property. The owner's increased interest in a possible sale has also been heightened as an adjacent property went on the market for sale and is now under contract by the same developer.

Staff also took advantage of an invite by the Colorado Chapter of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to conduct a Technical Advisory Program (TAP) for the approximate 120-acre Sugar Mill area. Consisting of a panel of development experts and involving a multitude of stakeholders and experts in a variety of fields and the area landowners, the TAP put forth a number of recommendations designed to guide development discussions and identify potential means of moving redevelopment forward. ULI representatives will be scheduled to make a presentation to the City Council at an upcoming meeting in the near future. The full TAP report will be provided to City Council in advance of the meeting.

### **2021-22 Southeast Longmont Planning/Redevelopment Work Plan**

Premised on staffing and funding capacity, the Planning and Redevelopment Divisions propose to pursue the following activities this year and into 2022.

#### *Development framework, general urban design guidelines, and market analysis*

Building on the completed vision for the initial S.T.E.A.M area and the ULI TAP for the Longmont Sugar Mill, the next step is to further articulate the concepts and vision for the areas by preparing and adopting a development framework and set of urban design guidelines. In addition, staff will perform a Code audit identifying potential impediments to fulfilling the vision; this will build off the code update recommendations identified in the Main Street Corridor Plan. This endeavor will also incorporate a market analysis to set forth realistic expectations on uses and timing of development that then can be used in developing

phasing strategies as beneficial and desired. The DDA and LEDP recently completed a citywide market assessment that can form the basis of this analysis. These logical steps will provide information that will also allow for an assessment of infrastructure needs.

### *Connectivity and Multi-modal transportation Network analysis*

The S.T.E.A.M area from S. Pratt Parkway to and thru the Longmont Sugar Mill properties has accessibility issues in all directions. The transportation network is insufficient with many of the areas having little or no connectivity. This situation is further complicated by the siting of a number of rail spurs and utility facilities. Bicycle and pedestrian access is also severely impeded. In order to understand and address these challenges, a plan needs to be formulated to improve connectivity for all modes of transportation.

### *Environmental assessment – Phase 1*

Given the types of uses within the area and its extensive history, it is highly likely the area is subject to some form of environmental degradation, thus qualifying it as a Brownfields Redevelopment Area. The environmental issues can range from soil and water contamination to structural asbestos, and also range from severe to non-existent. A better understanding of these matters would benefit Staff in its development recruitment efforts. As a Brownfields, the City and prospective developers would enhance access to a variety of grant and loan programs to assist in assessing and mitigating the environmental conditions.

### *Infrastructure capacity analysis and needs assessment (water, sanitary, electrical, gas, WIFI, storm)*

While there is some existing infrastructure in the STEAM-Phase 1 and Longmont Sugar Mill area, it is unlikely that adequate capacity exists. The availability of adequate infrastructure, or at least the identification of a strategy to provide such infrastructure, is one of the most critical elements to attracting development interest. Given the high number of land ownerships, some of which are extremely small, may make it physically and/or financially impracticable to install such infrastructure in an incremental manner as development occurs. A basic utility plan identifying deficiencies and opportunities is essential to establishing implementation strategies and policy that will support and encourage redevelopment.

### *Financing and Funding Strategies*

One of the primary challenges to attracting private development along the S.T.E.A.M corridor is the associated higher development cost relative to the generally lower market returns perceived by the development community. Thus, an assessment of funding needs and potential sources will permit the City to prepare an effective strategy to address any perceived or real financial disparity. The St. Vrain corridor from S. Pratt Parkway east to the Sugar Mill properties falls within, or have the opportunity to be annexed into, the boundaries of the Southeast Longmont Urban Renewal Area, which offers the potential to generate and utilize tax increment funds (TIF) as a means to facilitate redevelopment within the corridor.

# CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

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## **ATTACHMENTS:**

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