

Stability & Change in Fort Collins' University Neighborhoods



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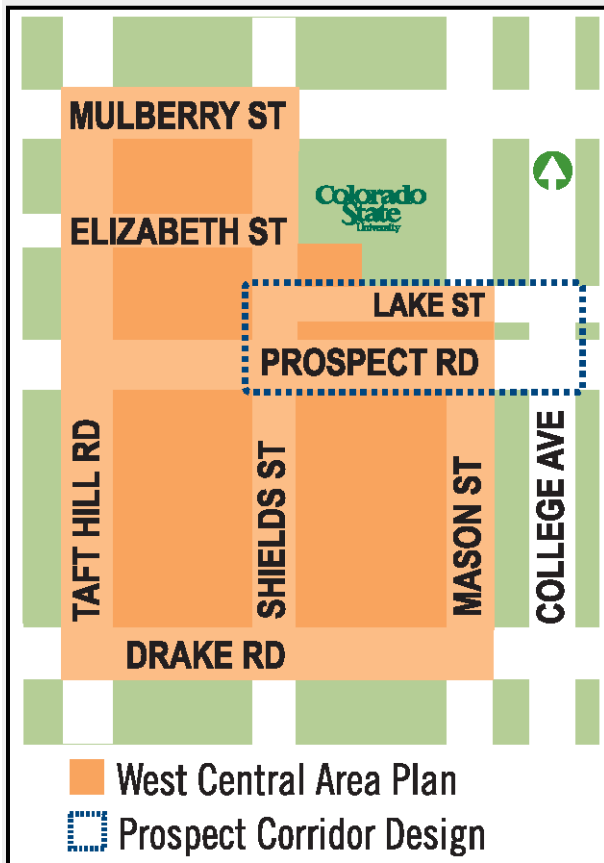
Stability & Change in Fort Collins' University Neighborhoods

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The Fort Collins neighborhoods south and west of the Colorado State University (CSU) main campus have been heavily shaped by the growth of the university and its associated student population for the past 150 years. At one point in time, Prospect Road and the CSU campus formed the southern edge of Fort Collins; yet today, the West Central Area is located in the heart of the city.

With a land area of approximately 3.6 square miles, the West Central area presently houses about 14.2% of the City's entire population on 6.7% of its total land area – making it the highest density area of the city. Moreover, CSU anticipates adding approximately 8,000 students and 1,000 faculty and staff by 2024, which will impact the area's housing demand and public and private service needs. The aging West Central neighborhoods – not to mention the roads, sidewalks, utilities, parks and other infrastructure in the area – face mounting pressure from enrollment growth,

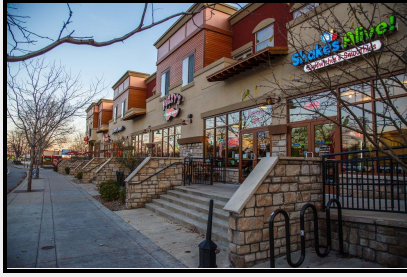
infill and redevelopment, and the conversion of owner-occupied homes to investor-owned rental properties.



In 2014, the City of Fort Collins embarked on an update to a 1999 subarea plan to address changing needs and protect the quality of life and character of these aging neighborhoods. The new West Central Area Plan, adopted in 2015, provides a vision, policy direction, and road map for the neighborhoods, commercial centers and key transportation corridors in this distinctive area.

The recommendations in the plan center on four cross-cutting topics: Land Use and Neighborhood Character, Transportation and Mobility, Open Space Networks, and a re-design of the Prospect Road corridor. Protecting historic character and social fabric was the highest priority for many neighborhood residents, and the community-driven planning effort resulted in a plan that reflects and responds to these concerns. In addition, the Prospect Road corridor is one of the most severely constrained roadways in the community and one of the primary arterial roads serving the West Central area and CSU campus. The West Central Area Plan tackled the issues on this corridor head-on and integrated a new design for the roadway into the plan – rather than delaying the design for a later process.

The final plan is a direct reflection of a collaborative planning process that engaged neighborhood leaders, business owners, CSU representatives, and other key stakeholders. The community engagement effort was more extensive than any the City had ever undertaken for a subarea plan and included more than 20 neighborhood walking tours, a series of traveling listening sessions, workshops, open houses, a stakeholder advisory committee, visits to the farmers' market and events in the neighborhoods, living room chats with neighborhood groups, online questionnaires, and multiple presentations to the Chamber of Commerce and other local interest groups. The plan was adopted with unanimous support from City Council, not to mention the full support of neighborhood groups and other stakeholders.



The true worth of a planning document is proven in the implementation of its vision, policies, and action items. Since the West Central Area Plan was adopted in March 2015, over a dozen implementation actions are already underway. Student housing and other development activity continues in the West Central area, but with increased dialogue about the character and design of new buildings – and less neighborhood opposition – which can be substantially attributed to the clarified expectations and design guidelines established in the plan. Through an intergovernmental agreement with CSU, a number of transportation improvement projects on or near the Prospect Corridor have been funded and are under construction, including a bike/pedestrian underpass that provides a safe alternative to get to the CSU campus.

While the vision of the West Central Area Plan has yet to be fully realized, its coordinated and collaborative approach sets a new standard for planning in Fort Collins and represents a model that can be easily replicated for future planning efforts – both in Fort Collins and in other communities facing similar challenges.



For more information on the planning process and the final plan document, please visit <http://fcgov.com/westcentral>.