

## **Joint Study Session of Boulder County Commissioners and Boulder Planning Commission for Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Assessment and Scope – Nov. 3, 2014**

### *Board of County Commissioners Present:*

- Cindy Domenico
- Deb Gardner
- Elise Jones

### *Planning Commission Members Present:*

- Michael Baker
- Dan Cohen
- Lieschen Gargano
- Scott Holwick
- W.C. Pat Shanks
- Doug Young

### *Staff and Consultants Present:*

- Pete Fogg, Abigail Shannon, and Dale Case (Boulder County)
- Lesli Ellis and Jean Gatzka (City of Boulder)
- Ben Herman (Clarion Associates)

**P. Fogg:** Provided slides with background of the Plan beginning with the 1970s county zoning in the Valley. He described the urban/rural set up - Area I, II, III maps, etc. and why the city/county partnership was created. He also provided an overview of the amendment procedures as articulated in the Plan.

**D. Gardner:** How was the gray (BVCP planning area) boundary determined in the 1970s?

**P. Fogg:** Depends on the location of the boundary, but it is generally based on topographic features, the City's "blue line" on the west, provision of urban services, other existing service providers' boundaries like Left Hand Water District, etc.

**B. Herman:** Provided an overview presentation with consultant observations about the current BVCP. It has more moving parts and applications than does the county's Plan. Key observations prior to the City Council and Planning Board discussion included:

- 1 – tell story better about the vision in the Plan
- 2 – make Plan more informative, graphic
- 3 – opportunity to integrate efforts in Plan
- 4 – articulate/define what a clear sustainable urban form is (city only?)
- 5 – develop better linkages between Plan and implementation tools
- 6 – clarify policies in key areas
- 7 – consider measuring outcomes via monitoring, indicator and metrics tools

He also explained the possible Range of Approaches shown on a slide to update the Plan, from minor to more major, and stated that the city discussed an update effort possibly in the range of

about 2.5 on a scale from 1 to 5. The city would like to modernize the Plan and develop stronger linkages to implementation and metrics.

### Questions and Comments:

**P. Shanks:** Provide PowerPoints. **P. Fogg** will send.

The relationships between master plans and sections in the Plan is interesting. Often it's an advisory board that works hard on a master plan – has been done substantially in some areas and not at all in others. What are consultant observations about how these work?

**B. Herman:** There seems to be a bit of an unevenness between topics and an opportunity to tie them in better with the Plan; some are very plugged into the BVCP while others are not. Master Plans are a good tool to be able to address topics at a level of detail while keeping the BVCP approachable and accessible, less daunting.

**P. Fogg:** The county does not do area or topical plans in the same way that the city does except for in a few areas (e.g., open space or health). Also, the county does not have the same number of advisory boards as the city.

**C. Domenico:** Metrics idea is intriguing. What do they look like in plans that the consultant is familiar with?

**B. Herman:** Example of Transportation Master Plan that has dozen of metrics and a lot of data. Health care has metrics. At BVCP level, it's more about the big things that tell us how we're doing overall – big picture. From there, you can drill into the details.

**P. Fogg:** County staff did a lot of research on this topic while preparing the Sustainability Element for the BVCP—mostly considering municipalities where this work has been done. You can “over-metric” a plan. Santa Monica example had over 100, and it became difficult to administer; some didn't fit together well or clashed or were hard to quantify/measure. Reducing to fundamental goal driven metrics can be daunting, but it would be helpful. Takes diligence and a cold eye to do so.

**D. Gardner:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges and Opportunities slide identifies “Resiliency.” Because of the federal money and interest in this topic, communities will be developing projects to fit the resiliency component. Are the words sustainability and resiliency (or resilience) interchangeable?

**B. Herman/L. Ellis:** No, resilience is not a replacement for sustainability. There isn't a common definition of “resiliency” which is a problem in itself. Needs to be a new overarching concept to include in our thinking. Ties to long term vision.

**C. Dominico:** Long term urban services aren't sustainable in rural areas. Resilience is a useful new lens.

**B. Herman:** Question for the Planning Commission and Commissioners about what level of effort should occur for the BVCP update: do you agree with the city boards or have different thoughts?

**D. Cohen:** To do the full list of issues and challenges presented might be more than 2.75 on the scale. We often don't go the distance that it takes to make the full list happen. Glad to see that will happen. The definition of sustainability/resilience is the fundamental question – manage change in appropriate way – dealing with density and transit, etc. Include the boundaries question – city boundaries don't necessarily work with climate issues, etc. Think a little bigger. Sometimes there is a disjunction between how we count and or versus what our goals are. Example is we kept that car out of Boulder so we don't count it, but the car and its impacts are still out there.

**B. Herman:** Boundary – may want to address some of these ideas as a system. Resilience is not quite as value laden as the notion of self-sustaining. Communities struggle with how we define boundaries and limits. Resilience is something people seem to understand a bit more intuitively.

**S. Holwick:** Resilience is less value laden. Everyone wants to be resilient.

**D. Young:** Like what Dan said: do one thing or a few and do them well. Liked the idea of focusing on the vision graphically so people can identify with the plan more. That might carry the plan forward through updates to go forward as opposed to yet another thing that fell off the plate. Examples of urban form – if you could provide those graphics – options, that would be helpful. When people are afraid or don't have a clear vision, they want or are more comfortable sticking with the status quo. Need to provide a graphic that provides example of status quo, too. Defining city's urban form will influence the county a lot in things like housing stock, and (as a Planning Commission member), I'm not sure what county housing stock should be like—not sure county's vision is solidly articulated either. City could be a great proving ground. Agree with colleagues about sustainability and resilience; they are not the same thing. Systems approach might be a great way to look at resilience (i.e., need to be able to poke the system and have it bounce back.) Really being sustainable also means being adaptive in the long term. Sustainability means getting a comfort level with the long term vs. “now”. Sustainability is a longer wave length than resiliency.

**E. Jones:** Commenting through the lens as a county commissioner, a Boulder resident, and former Planning Commissioner. I appreciate the conversation about sustainability. There's overlap with resiliency, but they are two different things. Sustainability is a desired state (more proactive), whereas resiliency is the ability to bounce back (more reactive). Both are really important, and it is important to include both in the Plan. Appreciate the conversation around topics such as chronic issues like poverty. Urban form might be a bit disconnected from the county, but the partnership between city and county on land use and urban/rural is important on this topic. The partnership only works if we can figure out how to make density acceptable in the city – rural can only work if density is OK'd. It has always been a source of frustration that the Plan does not answer “how are we doing” because we don't have process or metrics to address that question. Could use the Plan as a barometer to help answer that question. Give a shout out for regionalism – that is the single most effective aspect of the Plan, and I like that no one is calling that into question. The BVCP is an example in the state, and many pressing issues are regional. For instance, with transportation we have to think big (e.g., BRT, regional air quality, oil and gas emissions). Local food is another topic the city and county have been addressing together. Making the document more accessible and readable is a good idea; we especially need to do so to encourage the next generation to read and access the Plan. We need to move to new technology – to get people to engage. Finally, let's acknowledge that every update always takes longer and more effort than we want.

**C. Domenico:** Visual piece and telling the story. Visuals of photos of past and present, and 3D graphic visuals could really excited people. Agree on resilience and sustainability components as well as metrics. Would be helpful to look at clarifying policies around Area II. Transit routes – some interesting structures and facilities. Question is how to bring them into the city, and is there a tie to affordable housing? Economic viability. Partnership is amazing and really important.

**B. Herman:** Don't sell short what needs to be done or the effort it will take.

**P. Shanks:** Liked the comments about metrics – really important for setting baselines/indicators/accomplishment of goals vs. using lots of words. Agree with the experience

with the Plan policies – it can be all things to all people. It gets quoted at City Council or Board of Commissioners for or against an issue. Maybe the definitions are not tight enough or enabling regulations don't link tightly enough at the city level. There may be a closer link between the County Comp Plan and county regulations, whereas in the BVCP, there seems to be less linkage with the code and regulations (e.g., grow paying its own way is murky in the city). There seems to be a more clear vision for Boulder County (e.g., a series of urban centers with rural areas in between), which is pretty much what we have today. Regional thinking is important. Boulder gets accused of exporting sprawl – how do we reduce/minimize undesirable consequences spinning off from the Plan? Think about urban form, urban centers. How self-sufficient can we be? Do centers enable transit so people don't have to drive? A lot of things like that need to be addressed. Neighborhoods are important. Right now the Plan doesn't have much about them. There's a lot of annexation activity. That would be a welcome addition to the comp plan. Agree with everything that's been said. Pick some of the things that are important and create clear linkages to metrics and/or regulations. At the county, we have been working through the Boulder County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP), and shortly thereafter there are regulation updates to reflect that Plan. It might be a little simpler, but it does seem that the BCCP and regulations are more tightly linked. For the BVCP, there may be some items in the Plan that don't lend themselves to regulations. Maybe they should be identified.

**D. Young:** The BCCP does seem simpler, whereas the city and its interaction with DRCOG, etc., is more complicated. With the county plan, it has been more like a rolling update, and we can see policy changes and regulation changes immediately afterward vs. going through a BVCP Five year trauma. This means some sections are less up to date than others, but that's OK. Not sure if that approach is applicable for BVCP. It's a pretty hefty document – daunting for anyone except the hardiest of planners. The BVCP suffers from having people being a bit attached to policies – new language and policies get added, not taken out.

**D. Cohen:** Agree with Doug and reiterate what Pat says – update the Plan in a conscientious way to develop a cleaner link with land use code. It is hard to use from a development standpoint. The most useful thing about the Plan is the partnership between the city and county, otherwise it is not user friendly. It has weak language in some places, and often gets ignored or pushed aside during an argument. Staff will present a report to Planning Board – the process can be unpredictable. The Plan should be a good basis for the code to implement the vision. On the metrics side, metrics should be informative not prescriptive. Be careful about drawing a hard line, but instead create standards that can evolve. I concur, the document could be more user friendly. County and city both have great GIS systems. The BVCP could interface with GIS to provide access and information from large to small scale.

**M. Baker:** Picking up from there. Regulations, standards, guidelines – adding that stronger link would help the Plan be more user friendly and would provide clarity and certainty.

**D. Cohen:** Everyone benefits from clarity in the Plan.

**P. Fogg:** Boulder County Healthy Communities annual reports – includes basic metrics and indicators. As example of how a document can use some basic info. As a primer – look at that example.

**D. Gardner:** The slide you presented with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges and Opportunities – these topics are also very important to the county. It would be a missed opportunity if we didn't work on these

issues when we're doing an update. It is interesting observation that none of these are called out in the Key Observations list – are they implied?

**B. Herman:** Yes, at least two are implied, and a few of them such as resilience, climate and energy, and workforce housing are parallel efforts at the city.

**L. Ellis:** Yes, the city has talked about all these issues quite a bit. We will send you a more detailed summary from the city joint study session.

**D. Gardner:** Good because if we just focus on the “size of the breadbox” without the key 21<sup>st</sup> Century topics we aren't doing our job.

**D. Cohen:** Be more proactive about these topics not passive about leaving it the same. Use the policies to drive outcome accomplishments, not just add more policies.

**L. Gargano:** If modernization is a goal, making the BVCP more accessible would help even if a lot of it doesn't change policies much.

**B. Herman:** Next steps include preparing a consultant report and scope of work. Plan launch will not start until early 2015. If you have additional thoughts or comments about the plan, community engagement, or other topics please send them to Pete Fogg.