

Mineral Avenue Station Littleton, Colorado

A Strategy for the Development of the Mineral Avenue Station Area

July 9–12, 2006
An Advisory Services Program Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute
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About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 34,000 members and associates from 90 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals rep-

resented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan
President

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About ULI Advisory Services

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, partici-

pants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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Special thanks go to Mary Roberts, community development director, and the entire staff of the community development department, who were involved in the preparation for this panel. The countless hours that they spent preparing for, informing, and assisting the panel were truly

appreciated. The panel would also like to thank Charlie Blosten, public works director; Chris Gibbons, director of business and industry affairs; Bill Sirois, manager of transit-oriented development (TOD) at the Regional Transportation District (RTD); and Susan Altes, manager of real property at RTD for sharing their insights and contributing candid discussion on the Mineral Avenue station area.

In all, the panel had the opportunity to interview more than 30 community stakeholders, all of whom provided valuable and insightful information. The interviewees included government officials, residents, business leaders, developers, property owners, and community activists. Their shared perspectives were essential to the panel process. This group of stakeholders is a major asset in advancing and maintaining the interests of this community.

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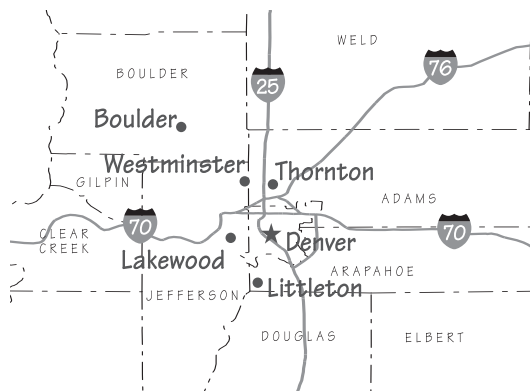
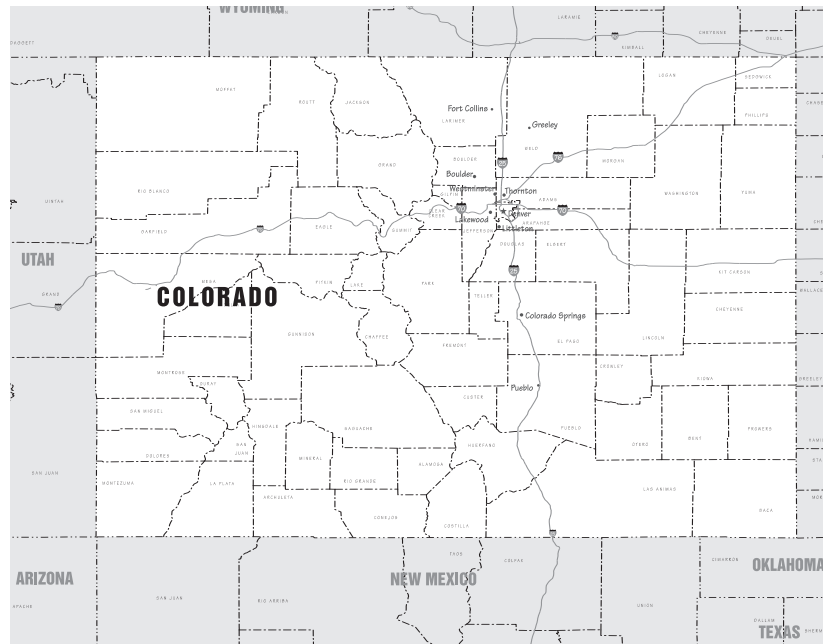
Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

Littleton is a suburban city ten miles southwest of Denver, Colorado. Developed in the 1950s and 1960s, the city has a population of just over 42,000 residents. Bordered by the city of Englewood to the north, the city of Centennial to the east, unincorporated southern Jefferson County to the west, and the planned community of Highlands Ranch to the south, Littleton encompasses 13.83 square miles of nearly completely developed land. In fact, only 280 acres of vacant land remain. Essentially all new growth is infill development. In recent years the community has begun to scrutinize the type and design of projects as residents seek higher-quality developments that add value to the community.

Littleton is fortunate to have excellent access to Denver via US-85, also known as Santa Fe Drive. The Regional Transportation District's (RTDs) southwest corridor light-rail line runs through the city, with stops in downtown Littleton and at the line's terminus at Mineral Avenue, the focus of this study. As part of the FasTracks initiative, the line will be extended south to Highlands Ranch by 2016. Ridership has exceeded projections and communities along the line are beginning to feel development pressures around the stations.

The Study Area

The Mineral Avenue station is located at the intersection of Santa Fe Drive and Mineral Avenue. The station platform sits on the northeast corner of the intersection and the parking on the northwest corner. The two are connected by a pedestrian bridge over Santa Fe Drive. The station has 1,227 parking spaces and a bus transfer station. The 18-acre RTD parcel has a high-intensity use designation on the city's comprehensive plan. The current use is parking for the light-rail station and a bus transfer facility. Higher-intensity uses will require an amendment to the approved planned development plan on the site. Any such amend-

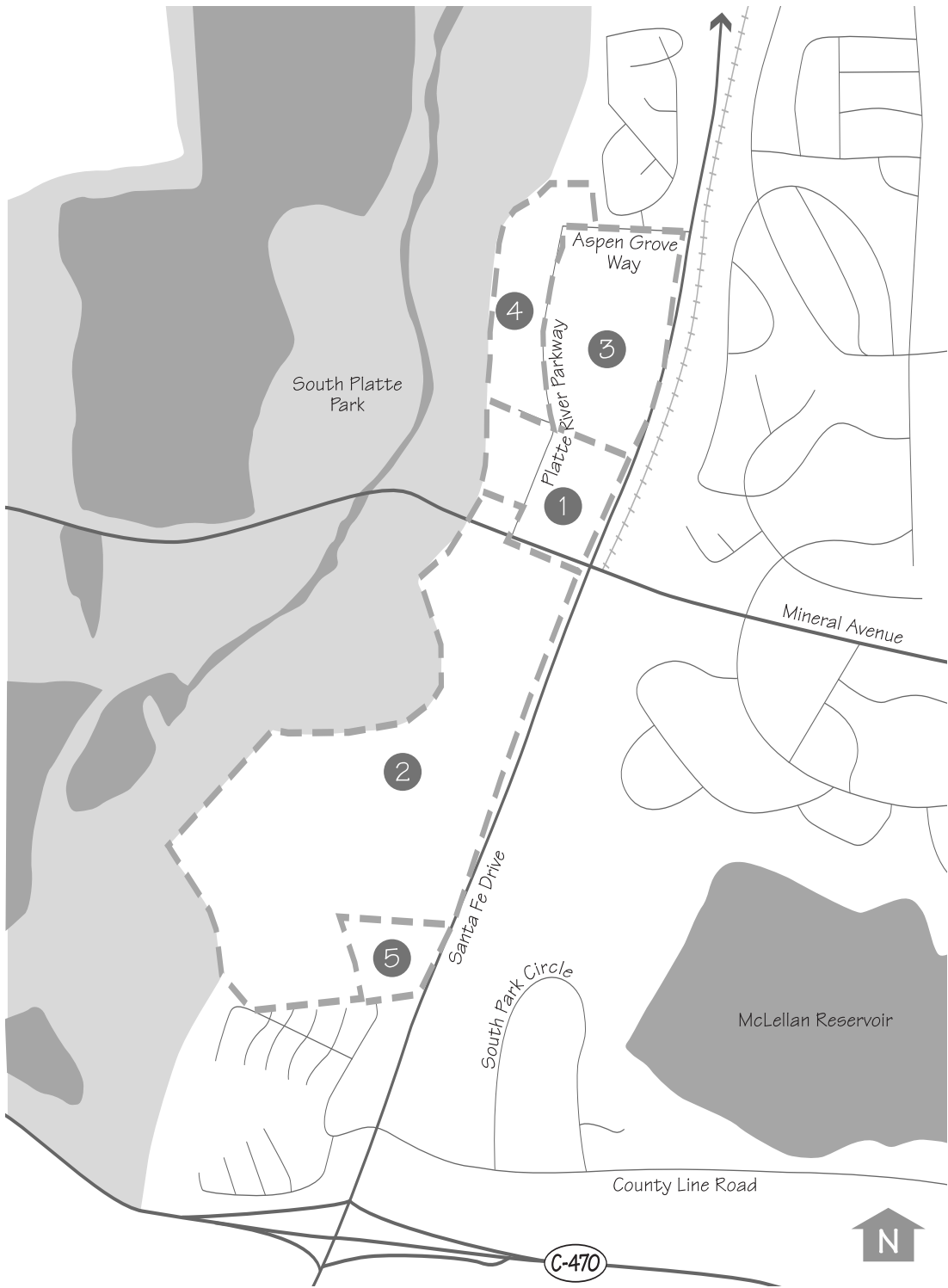


Above: Location map.
Left: Regional map.

ment must continue to provide 1,227 free parking spaces in the redevelopment. Immediately north of the station is the 240,000-square-foot Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center. Although this retail center is mostly built out, a few development pads are available and a 17-acre parcel is currently zoned for office space. North of the center is a 19-acre parcel of land that is the proposed site of a

Parcel ownership.

- Key
- Park
 - Water
 - Light Rail
 - 1 = Light-Rail Station
 - 2 = Ensor Property
 - 3 = Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center
 - 4 = Quadrant Property
 - 5 = Wild Acres Animal Clinic



Wal-Mart Super Center. Southwest of the station is the 160-acre Ensor property, which is zoned for commercial and residential uses. South of the Ensor property is the Wild Acres Animal Clinic and a mobile home community that borders the C-470 highway. East of the station, two residential neighborhoods sit above Santa Fe Drive.

The entire study area is bordered by South Platte Park to the west. This 650-acre park is a valuable asset to Littleton and the southwest section of the Denver metropolitan area, because it provides wildlife habitat, educational programming, and both passive and active recreation. The park is connected to a much larger regional recreational trail via the Mary Carter and Columbine multiuse trails. Development of any of the properties that are adjacent to the park is viewed as unfavorable by many in the community because they fear that the encroachment of development will reduce the quality of the wildlife habitat in the park.

The Panel's Assignment

At the invitation of the city of Littleton, a ULI Advisory Services panel convened to evaluate the development opportunities around the Mineral Avenue light-rail station. The city and RTD asked the panel to address the viability of transit-oriented development (TOD) at the Mineral Avenue station; if it is viable, to determine how large that development should be; to suggest an appropriate mix of uses; and to recommend how best to connect the uses to the surrounding area. The panel was also charged with suggesting how the development might be phased so that RTD could continue unimpeded operations during construction, should there be a joint development opportunity; with recommending ways to make the area special and more distinct in the market; and with determining whether or not a hotel is appropriate in the station area.

The Panel Process

Before arriving in Littleton the panel members received briefing books that included history and background information on the city, demographic and market information for the city and county, descriptions of upcoming and proposed projects in the city, and an overview of the planning and development review process. When the panel members arrived, they were briefed by representatives from the city manager's office and the community development department. The panel toured the study area to see the existing conditions and development potential. Members met with community leaders and stakeholders who shared valuable insights on the Mineral Avenue station area. They spent the next day examining the issues, discussing and debating solutions, and framing recommendations. The panel then presented its findings and recommendations to the community. This report summarizes the panel's key recommendations and observations.

Development Framework

To guide the development of the Mineral Avenue station area, the panel recommends that the city create a development framework plan. The framework plan is intended to create a common community vision for the station area and the development parcels. The plan should be created with the input of key stakeholders such as private property owners, residents, environmentalists, park advocates, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and RTD, so that the plan reflects the entire community's desires and to ensure buy-in during the buildout of the area.

Purpose of the Plan

The development framework plan will help accomplish many community goals with respect to the development of the Mineral Avenue station area. It will determine the vision and make clear the desired outcomes. The result will be a predictable development decision-making process that will guide residents, civic leaders, city staff, developers, and the finance community when problems or difficulties arise in the development of the study area. The plan will help the city maximize the limited available land resources to ensure long-term sustainability and to maintain the vitality of the natural environment and the local economy. It will also help determine current and long-term needs for various land uses.

The plan should be comprehensive and based on components of regulations and plans that the city currently uses in relation to the development of the station area. It may be necessary to update or detail documents such as the comprehensive plan, current zoning regulations, the south Santa Fe corridor and downtown study, and the design recommendations for the South Platte River corridor.

Components

Key components of the plan will be a series of detailed market studies and impact analyses. The panel recommends that the city begin the following studies.

Retail. This study is necessary to determine the type and amount of retail that the Mineral Avenue station area can support. It should look at neighborhood-serving retail, large-scale national retailers, and destination retail.

Office. The office study should look at the need for a variety of office uses. It should take into account office condo, flex space, large floor-plate, and medical office uses.

Hotel. This study should determine whether a hotel is feasible in the Mineral Avenue station area and, if so, what kind of hotel would be appropriate.

Residential. The residential study should determine the number and type of housing units that the station area can support. It should take account of the potential for mixed-use development, a type not common in Littleton.

Environmental. An environmental impact analysis should be undertaken and a mitigation strategy created to ensure that the development of the Mineral Avenue station area has no negative impacts on South Platte Park.

Transportation. A transportation impact analysis and mitigation strategy should determine the impacts that increased traffic from development of the area will have on the surrounding roads and infrastructure. It is essential that the analysis take into account the number of users who will be accessing the development from the light-rail line.

Products

The development framework plan will generate a number of products. These products are detailed

guidelines that will clearly articulate the city's vision for the area and will set the standards for the desired development. The products of the framework plan include the following:

- A strategic land use plan;
- A set of sustainability principles and priorities such as green building, low-impact design, and development sensitive to natural areas and wildlife;
- An open space management and preservation plan and strategy;
- Detailed design guidelines for buildings, streetscapes, landscaping, access, and circulation; and
- A transportation plan that includes pedestrian connectivity, recreational trails, and parking management.

Recommended Process and Means

The panel recommends funding the development framework plan through Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds made available by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) for transit station planning. The creation of the plan should be a collaborative process between all stakeholders that should take no more than six months.

Planning and Design

The panel recommends that the city create and follow an overall design framework plan that embraces sustainable development at its core. With an excellent location along an expanding transit line, the Mineral Avenue site is primed for TOD. The station area is also located directly next to a natural regional attraction that is a key asset for Littleton and the station area. Development of this site will need to occur in a sensitive manner, to ensure the preservation of South Platte Park and to build a sense of place for the city.

Overall Design Framework

The purpose of the design framework plan is to create the aesthetic vision for the Mineral Avenue station area. Creating this vision is important because it will set the standards and clearly detail what is expected of developers who wish to build in the area. As for the suggested overall development framework plan, the design framework should be created with the input of key stakeholders and the community.

The plan should provide a form-based design and development framework for compact development: building up, not out. The overall form should move from intense compact development at the core, with transit-oriented uses and structured and underground parking adjacent to the light-rail station, to less intense and natural development as growth spreads farther from the core and meets South Platte Park. The framework plan should create a strong sense of the public realm, to capture Littleton's tradition of creating and supporting community-based gathering places. The panel recommends that the plan incorporate design guidelines that create a strong sense of place, by providing spaces that people want to spend time in and that people can easily identify with. Town squares, public plazas, and amphitheaters

should be included in the plan, because they will help create and foster that sense of place.

The Mineral Avenue station area is fortuitously located next to South Platte Park and the South Platte River Greenway. These regional attractions are tremendous amenities for the city and for any development that will take place in the area. The plan should incorporate and complement these two valuable assets because they also help create a sense of place.

Sustainable Development Concept

Given the area's location on transit lines and its proximity to rich wildlife habitat, a key theme in the design framework plan should be sustainable development. Colorado is a national leader in sustainable development research and practice. The creation of a sustainable community is a natural fit for the Mineral Avenue station site and for Littleton. A sustainable community built on the scale of the Mineral Avenue station area would not only be good for the environment but also garner national attention because it would be one of a kind. Developers are increasingly incorporating sustainable practices into their projects, not only because of the environmental benefits but also because of demand by consumers and because of the reduced operating expenses such practices bring about. If done correctly, a sustainable community at the Mineral Avenue station will provide a genuine sense of place, set Littleton apart from other suburban communities in the Denver area, and make a lasting positive impact on the city.

To create a sustainable community, the city must incorporate sustainable infrastructure into the design framework plan. The plan should aim to have the Mineral Avenue station area and all new buildings within it qualify for the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system.



Mineral Avenue station
planning districts.

- Key**
- Park
 - Water
 - Light Rail
 - Middle Mineral District
 - C-470 District
 - Aspen Grove
 - Lifestyle Center
 - Quadrant District

The key sustainable elements that must be provided for in the plan to qualify for LEED ratings include:

- Energy efficiency;
- Water conservation and recycling;
- Indoor air quality;
- Recycling;
- Recycled building materials; and
- Proximity to transit.

Examples of sustainable infrastructure include pervious paving and bioswales, rather than detention ponds, to help mitigate stormwater runoff; landscaping that includes natural native plants and xeriscaping, to reduce the need for water in the arid climate; and the inclusion of trees on the site to reduce the heat island effect. Connections with the South Platte Park and South Platte River Greenway should also be fostered to integrate the natural amenities into the station area.

Mineral Avenue Station Area Design Districts

Within the station area the panel has designated three distinct planning areas or districts: the C-470 district, the Middle Mineral district, and the Quadrant district. In addition to the new planning districts the panel has included the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center, because it is a significant part of the station area. The recommendations for these districts cover a mixed-use framework and urban form, suggested land uses, and building types.

C-470 District

The C-470 district lies west of Santa Fe Drive, north of C-470, and east of South Platte Park. The northern boundary falls where there is a bulge in the boundary of the park. This district, which is primarily undeveloped, comprises the Ensor property, the Wild Acres Animal Clinic, and the mobile home community that is directly north of C-470.

The panel envisions the primary uses of the C-470 district as medium- and large-format retail and large-footprint high-rise office. This district is ideal

for such uses because of its excellent access and visibility from the C-470 highway. Large-format retailers such as Target, Kohl's, or Best Buy would be attracted to such a site, and medium-format retailers such as King Soopers, Linens-N-Things, and Staples could go here as well. The site is also attractive to a large-footprint office user because of its access and visibility from C-470. Appropriate complementary uses within the district are mid-rise office and residential. The panel recommends designing the district as a pedestrian-friendly area with wide sidewalks, lighting, street trees, and safe street crossings. It also recommends that parking be placed behind buildings or in parking structures to foster a pedestrian orientation. Strong connections should also be made with the Middle Mineral district.

Middle Mineral District

The Middle Mineral district lies west of Santa Fe Drive, north of the bulge in South Platte Park, east of the park, and south of the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center. This district comprises the northern part of the Ensor property and the RTD parcel. The Mineral Avenue light-rail station is located here, as are the park-and-ride lots and the RTD bus transfer station. The district is bisected by Mineral Avenue. Connections between the Ensor property and the RTD parcel are minimal at best. Because of the size and physical constraints of this district, the panel has divided it into two sections, the Ensor property to the south of Mineral Avenue and the RTD parcel to the north.

South of Mineral Avenue. The panel's recommended uses for this portion of the district include large- and medium-format retail fronting Santa Fe Drive, large-footprint mid- to high-rise office space, a hotel, and an upscale grocery store such as Wild Oats or Whole Foods. This district should be pedestrian friendly, with parking underground or within structures that are wrapped to hide the facades of the garages. The panel also recommends mid-rise residential as a complementary use on the site. A constraint on this site is its difficult connection to the light-rail station. The panel recommends construction of a pedestrian bridge to ease access across Mineral Avenue.

RTD parcel. The recommended uses for the RTD parcel are a mixed-use town center that includes underground and structured parking, upscale rental or for-sale housing, a hotel, retail and office space, and a town square or gathering place. Parking will be a constraint because of the number of proposed uses and the need for RTD park-and-ride spaces. The panel recommends that the city, RTD, and developers explore, create, and implement a shared parking strategy.

Quadrant District

The Quadrant district is located north of the RTD park-and-ride lot, west of the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center, and east and south of South Platte Park. The parcel is under contract by the Quadrant group and is completely undeveloped. The site is zoned for office uses, but there has been pressure from the development community to change the zoning to residential uses.

The panel's recommended uses for the Quadrant district include mid-rise townhomes closest to the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center and a low-density townhome development with a park setting closest to South Platte Park. The district should have strong pedestrian connections to South Platte Park, the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center, and the town center to be developed on the RTD parcel.

Aspen Grove District

Although the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center is outside the primary study area, the panel felt it necessary to recommend a number of design enhancements to better integrate the center with the Mineral Avenue station area. The panel recommends adding trees to the parking lot to enhance the center's appearance and to help mitigate its heat island effect. Pedestrian improvements such as wider medians and wayfinding signage should be incorporated to improve walkability. The panel also recommends that the center expand the number of lifestyle, cultural, and entertainment events it holds, to draw visitors to the center and the station area.

Transportation

The Mineral Avenue station area is a critical intersection within Littleton and the neighboring communities. As a crossroads for traffic heading to and from Denver along Santa Fe Drive and as a gateway to C-470 and I-25, the area is important to the region's sustainability. In addition, its role as the current terminus of the light-rail line affects the type of development that will take place in the area. It is essential that any new development respect the importance of the surrounding transportation infrastructure. It is also important to consider the impacts of any new transportation infrastructure projects on any new development in the station area.

Transportation Opportunities and Constraints

The panel has evaluated the transportation corridors adjacent to, bisecting, and within the Mineral Avenue station area. It offers the following observations and recommendations for each corridor and for transportation mode opportunities and constraints with respect to the development of the station area.

Santa Fe Drive (US-85)

Santa Fe Drive, a major arterial road, borders the study area on its eastern boundary. Santa Fe Drive is an important regional corridor that connects Littleton and the communities of the southwest Denver metropolitan area with the city of Denver. It is a limited-access highway with few east-west connections. The corridor is designed with two typical sections, a four-lane section with two northbound and two southbound travel lanes and an eight-lane section at major intersections. The southbound portion of the eight-lane section has two dedicated left-turn lanes, two through lanes, and one dedicated right-turn lane. The northbound section has one dedicated right-turn lane and two through lanes.

The corridor's importance in the region provides many opportunities for the Mineral Avenue station area. Santa Fe Drive is busy, with 48,000—50,000 vehicles passing through the corridor daily. A significant number of these daily trips are made by freight and heavy trucks that are passing through the area. The high number of average daily trips (ADT) along the corridor is a key asset for future retail and commercial uses. DRCOG projections show an increase in both vehicular and freight travel along the corridor. This projected increase is good for the health of the station area, assuming that the infrastructure is maintained to handle the increasing traffic.

Recommendations. Santa Fe Drive is an important regional corridor. The panel recommends that the city recognize the corridor's current and future function with respect to the development of the station area. The city must continue to work with CDOT to maintain Santa Fe Drive's current level of service by minimizing the number of curb cuts and access points. An increase in curb cuts and access points will affect traffic at the station area. The panel also recommends that the city anticipate future widening of the corridor. Although the expansion may not come for a number of years, it is important to make accommodations for it and to provide a high-quality design edge. This interface is key to the success of both the corridor and the station area development. Bicycle and pedestrian connections and facilities should also be incorporated into the design of the corridor, where necessary and possible.

Mineral Avenue

Mineral Avenue is an east-west corridor that connects western Arapahoe County with Littleton and Santa Fe Drive. The corridor is generally built out and sees 28,000 ADT. The typical section is four lanes, with two eastbound and two westbound travel lanes. The corridor is dramatically wider at the intersection of Santa Fe Drive, with

the west side being eight lanes and the east side being six lanes. The two-lane bridge over the Platte River limits eastbound capacity to the intersection while the informal kiss-and-ride dropoffs and pickups limit westbound capacity during peak hours.

Recommendations. The panel recommends development of a formal lay-by for a bus stop and for kiss-and-ride activities on the westbound side of Mineral Avenue. The lay-by would eliminate the current capacity decreases during peak hours. It is recommended that one eastbound travel lane west of the intersection be eliminated to narrow the cross-section. With westbound capacity limited by the bridge crossing and strategic signal timing, traffic should be metered to accommodate a single, dedicated left-turn lane. There should be little to no delay in the right-hand turn lane because of the pedestrian crossing. The panel believes that it is possible to have a shared right-turn and through lane.

It is recommended that the city develop design guidelines for the Mineral Avenue corridor to provide proper streetwalls and landscaped edges, to provide design consistency within the station area. The primary pedestrian crossing to the Ensor property should be an elevated one, when that property is developed. The panel also recommends that multiuse trails be provided parallel to but separate from the roadway, serving the residential development and destinations along the roadway.

Internal Roadways and Connections

The Mineral Avenue station area is mostly undeveloped. The development proposed in the following sections will require a significant amount of new roads and infrastructure to provide access from both Santa Fe Drive and Mineral Avenue. The lack of roads and infrastructure is an opportunity for the station area because it makes for a clean slate and an opportunity to design and build the roads the correct way the first time.

Recommendations. The panel recommends that in the planning for internal connections the city mandate “complete streets” in the station area. Complete streets are roadways that are designed appropriately for cars, bikes, pedestrians, and ser-

vice and transit vehicles. The city should promote a roadway grid and connectivity between development parcels, to spread the traffic over a number of streets rather than keep it on a single arterial. The panel recommends that the design follow organic natural features in the landscape to emphasize the authentic character and history of the place. Roadway widths should be minimized to slow traffic and allow mixed use of local streets. The panel also recommends that the city encourage green street designs in the development of the road infrastructure. Such designs include the minimization of impervious surfaces, storm-water management, low-impact design, a street tree canopy, and the minimization of light pollution with full-cutoff light fixtures. The location of utilities and drainage may present constraints that may interfere with the ability to achieve this recommendation.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Networks

Significant investments have been made in bicycle infrastructure in Littleton and the Denver region. This is readily apparent in the frequent use of the bicycle trail along the South Platte River Greenway. The same cannot be said for the use of pedestrian infrastructure. This is because the roads have been designed primarily for automobiles, with little regard for pedestrians. This is evident in the significant missing links in the pedestrian network from the residential communities of Wolhurst Landing, just north of Aspen Grove, and Wolhurst Adult Community, at the southern edge of the study area, to the retail destinations in the area. Pedestrian and bike routes from east of Santa Fe Drive to the transit station and South Platte Park are limited and circuitous.

The existing bicycle infrastructure and use patterns provide a number of opportunities in the station area. With the increase in the cost of gas, bicycle commuting is becoming a notable mode of choice. If this trend continues, it will reduce the number of cars on the road and effectively decrease the need for additional capacity on the corridors. The bicycle infrastructure is also a potential magnet for regional visitors and local tourists from the Denver region who will patronize the retail and commercial developments in the station area.

Recommendations. The panel recommends that the city ensure continuous pedestrian pathways between local destinations, particularly in immediate proximity to the transit station. Connections to the recreational trails should be expanded for the bike and pedestrian networks, which should also connect with the retail centers to provide access to services and to draw additional retail patronage and support. The panel recommends installing wayfinding signage on the recreational trails to inform cyclists about destinations within the station area. The panel also recommends that the city explore more direct and additional pedestrian and bicycle connections from the east to bicycle networks in South Platte Park. A multiuse “green mobility” path from the Wolhurst community to Bowles Avenue should be provided. This path should be designed to accommodate pedestrians, bikes, horses, personal electric vehicles, and other personal mobility options.

Parking

Parking resources in the Mineral Avenue station area are significant. The dominant land use is trending toward surface parking, with large lots at the transit station and the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center. Currently the station and the center act independently in providing parking for their users. The demand for the RTD park-and-ride lots outweighs the supply during the week, which reduces the parking supply at the Lifestyle Center because commuters illegally park there when parking is unavailable at the RTD lots. RTD policy and state law make all parking at the station free, and the site has no municipal parking or metered spaces.

Recommendations. The development of the station area will radically alter the current dominating land use (parking). Although the shape and nature of the area will change, the parking use will not disappear. Restructuring parking will have significant impacts on the proposed development, owing to the cost of replacing surface parking. The panel recommends that the city, RTD, and private landowners explore shared parking to maximize the use of parking spaces during all parts of the day. Doing so will require decoupling parking from use. For example, a parking space that is designated for office use during the day can be used for restaurants in the area at night. This mixed use will reduce the number of spaces needed and save on development costs. The city should encourage employers in the station area to manage transportation demand, through such options as employee transit subsidies, car sharing, live-near-work subsidies, and telecommuting. The panel recommends that the site be designed with a “park once and walk” strategy for patrons. This will allow visitors to take advantage of multiple uses in the area without having to use an automobile to get from one to the next. The panel also recommends that surface parking lots be designed as land banks for future development and that buildings be designed for future parking above them or for stacked parking in adjacent structures.

Implementation and Financing

Implementation staging can comprehensively address public and private goals in keeping with site opportunities and development constraints. The panel recommends that the city create a phasing strategy to help achieve sustainable, desirable development. The strategy will facilitate early exercise of development opportunities without compromising the infrastructure requirements associated with the RTD site, while engaging existing and future market support and defining sustainable development practices that are consistent with the physical setting.

Phasing development for an area considerably larger than the RTD site alone requires a systematic and predictable process that addresses zoning, planning, design, and public participation. A phasing strategy will help accelerate development timetables and lay out a clear framework for seeing the realization of the Mineral Avenue station area. Phasing can facilitate consensus, help create certainty, and foster a favorable climate for securing financing. Potential delays can be anticipated and cooperative measures structured to satisfy public and private expectations.

The RTD site cannot be developed without maintaining transit parking and bus bay access. Thus, potential reengineering of the City Ditch and a major east-west sewer line require examination. Mitigation measures must be identified early, to ensure conservation of South Platte Park. The northernmost sector of the Ensor property is a logical location for temporary station area parking. Parking at this location would not impede development of other sectors of the site, which—if phased properly—may contribute significantly to the development potential of the remaining Ensor property. Similarly, development on the Quadrant property can be designed to interact positively with park open space and wildlife, and with future RTD site development. It can also help contribute to the success of the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Cen-

ter, by enabling additional consumer patronage. A holistic strategy is needed for developing the RTD, Quadrant, and Ensor properties, to balance the costs associated with public and private commitments and to fulfill mutual expectations.

Implementation Phasing

The panel proposes phasing development on the RTD, Quadrant, and Ensor properties, treating these properties holistically so that development at one location benefits and sustains development in the other locations. Doing this will enhance market responsiveness to subsequent development on the RTD site because interim replacement transit parking will be close by, on the northerly portion of the Ensor property. Giving priority to development on the Quadrant and Ensor properties can help set the stage for subsequent development of the RTD site.

Phase One: Six to 12 Months (Predevelopment)

Predevelopment actions are geared toward completing the development framework, evaluating needed zoning redesignations, initiating planning, and securing timely public and private financing. The following actions should be taken.

Evaluate development framework. Evaluate the development framework in settings that engage local citizens, developers, the RTD, the Planning Commission, and city leaders. Give priority attention to issues regarding the staging of development, appropriate density, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, park preservation and conservation, and sustainability.

Evaluate zoning amendments. Review and redesignate the existing pattern of planned development zoning, stressing mixed-use development, and evaluate a potential role for overlay zones and related mechanisms.

Secure entitlements. Facilitate approvals for necessary zoning and other site development requirements. Consider pro-active rezoning by the city, and provide early guidance to development teams by clearly defining guidelines and requirements before any formal submittals are made.

Secure financing. Identify specific public and private funding mechanisms that may be available. Review their legal applicability and identify any authorizing ordinances, as needed.

Establish financing district authorities, if desired. Subject to staff and legal analysis and City Council concurrence, establish financing mechanisms such as property tax increments, sales tax increments, parking revenues, and bond financing, including private activity bonds (PABs). Establish general improvement districts (GIDs) and special improvement districts (SIDs).

Predevelopment actions taken in phase one help build a broad consensus among citizens and decision makers and minimize the potential of extraordinary delays or disapprovals during required public approval processes. These actions set a predictable process for both the city and developers. Predictability reduces public and private costs and enhances the attainment of both public and private goals.

Phase Two: 18 to 24 Months

The panel recommends that the following actions take place in the second phase of the implementation process.

Quadrant district. Complete development of this 17-acre property with townhome or condominium residential development, potentially with mixed-use neighborhood-serving retail, built with sustainable practices that protect the relationship of the site to South Platte Park. Stress a site and pedestrian orientation that supports future development of the RTD site and use of the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center.

C-470 district. Facilitate large floor-plate retail and corporate office development at the southernmost area of the site, in a form that promotes visibility and access to and from the Santa Fe Drive and C-470 interchange and that helps strengthen market capacity for future development.

The panel sees the implementation of phase two as critical to the success of the Mineral Avenue station area. Development of the Quadrant property is consistent with immediate developer opportunities; it reinforces a protective pattern of development adjacent to South Platte Park and enhances pedestrian links to the RTD and Aspen Grove sites. The development of this site will jump-start retail sales and produce a property tax revenue stream. Property and sales tax revenues will be enhanced as new residents move in to the Quadrant property and frequent the Aspen Grove Lifestyle Center. New property taxes will flow to city and county governments. Portions of property taxes and new sales taxes will be available to help fund transit-related improvements, subject to the creation of an Urban Renewal Authority (URA) project.

Phase Three: 24 to 36 Months

Development of the RTD site requires maintaining parking availability for 1,227 spaces and five bus bays, and preparing development plans to accommodate the City Ditch and a major sewer line, which are aligned generally north-south and east-west, respectively. The following actions should take place in the third phase of the implementation process.

Relocate parking to Ensor property. Based on agreement(s) with the Ensor site developers, provide interim transit parking and five bus bays at the northwestern section of the property, near the intersection of Santa Fe Drive and Mineral Avenue. Provide automobile access from Santa Fe and Mineral.

Construct pedestrian bridge connection. Complete a pedestrian bridge linking the RTD site and the Ensor property. Maintain interim parking and bus access until permanent parking and bus access is restored to the RTD site.

Construct below-grade structured parking. Build two levels of below-grade parking on the RTD site in the area now used for temporary station area parking. Provide at least 1,227 transit-related spaces, and make additional parking available for new mixed-use development.

Develop RTD and Ensor out-parcels for mixed use. Build mixed-use, residential, and retail development above the parking structure platform and other mixed-use or civic and entertainment uses, and potentially a boutique hotel, on the RTD site. Provide pedestrian access links to the transit station, parking, the Quadrant residential development, and the varied development on the Ensor property.

Phase three is one of the most important parts of the development process for the station area. The actions taken in this stage are critical. The benefits of these actions are that there is seamless and uninterrupted transit-related parking for existing and new transit users, who originate from Quadrant, Ensor, and eventually RTD site development, and elsewhere in the region. The RTD site will begin to emerge as a center for the larger surrounding district; the expanded property and sales tax base will contribute to the provision of services for the city of Littleton, and portions of new tax revenues will defray expenses associated with new infrastructure improvements. Another benefit is that retail and office absorption will be tested as new development comes on line.

Phase Four: 36 to 60 Months

The panel recommends that the following actions take place in the fourth phase of the implementation process.

Develop middle and north portions of Ensor property. Develop the middle and north portions of Ensor with multifamily and mixed-use development, using sustainable development practices. Choose building densities, type, and massing to respect and protect South Platte Park. Develop a new full-service park-oriented hotel, with access from Mineral Avenue.

Remove temporary parking. Remove interim transit-related parking and bus bay access. Complete remaining infrastructure and site preparation work to accommodate major mixed-use TOD.

Construct infrastructure. Link automobile and pedestrian access between the south, middle, and northern sites on the Ensor property. Build pedestrian access over Mineral Avenue to make new

civic and entertainment uses easily accessible by residents, employees, and visitors.

Construct mid- to high-density mixed-use commercial development. Round out site development of the Ensor property with centrally concentrated residential condominium and town home uses, and hotel and large floor-plate retail and office development.

The benefits of phase four are the full buildout of 200 acres within five years and the full buildout of a new transit-oriented district. Consensus-based and varied public and private goals and objectives are fulfilled. Another benefit is the significant new property and sales taxes that are available for use for public services. Their availability will expand upon the retirement of any debt obligations assumed for infrastructure construction and site development purposes.

Public Financing Tools

The city can use a number of public financing tools with the phasing strategy. They include the formation of special districts, the use of tax increment financing (TIF) from ad valorem and sales tax revenues, bond finance, and—subject to federal restrictions—Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds and tax credits to support development commitments.

Tax Increment Financing

TIF results from capturing portions of increased property and sales tax revenues within an urban renewal area. It can be used to finance “pay as you go” activities such as site clearance, site improvements, the installation of streets and other infrastructure, acquisition, and housing set-asides. TIF may be used to repay developers for upfront financing or to raise capital for significant early project expenditures through the issuance of tax allocation bonds or tax revenue bonds. Establishing an authority requires City Council findings of blight, approval of an urban renewal plan, consultations with the county, and other mandated processes. The mayor then appoints members of a board of directors, who must be ratified by the Council, to govern the authority.

Parking Authority/Parking Revenue

Unlike RTD, the city may charge for parking and use parking revenues to construct and operate parking facilities. Parking revenues may be pledged toward the repayment of parking revenue bonds. If sufficient market support is available, a private developer may not need public financial participation to build a parking facility.

If the city is not able to create a municipal parking authority, it may want to consider the creation of a nonprofit building authority. Building authorities can be organized under the Colorado Nonprofit Corporation Act (C.R.S. Title 7, Articles 20–29). The Act permits a building authority, on behalf of a city, to issue bonds to construct parking structures, bridges, and other facilities. Bond repayment can be secured with revenue commitments and through contracts with property owners and assessments charged on their property. Certificates of Participation can be sold to private investors to generate construction funding.

Community Development Block Grant

CDBG funds constitute a flexible source of money that provides communities with resources to address a wide range of community development activities directed toward revitalizing neighborhoods, enabling economic development, and providing improved community facilities and services. CDBG funds may be used for activities such as acquisition of real property; relocation and demolition; rehabilitation of residential and nonresidential structures; construction of public facilities and improvements; activities relating to energy conservation and renewable resources; job creation and retention; and low- and moderate-income housing production, with maximum feasible priority assigned to serving low- and moderate-income persons. Arapahoe County is charged with allocating funds for cities of fewer than 50,000 people. CDBG funding may be available to Littleton upon application to the county.

CMAQ (Congestion Management Air Quality) Funding

Later this year \$585,000 in CMAQ grant funding will be available from DRCOG through an application process. Funding awards, to be administered by the RTD, may be used for station area planning. The panel encourages the city to submit an

application to DRCOG and coordinate the request with DRCOG and RTD, as appropriate. Littleton will be required to come up with a minimum local match of 20 percent for any CMAQ grant funds.

Sales Tax District

TIF financing includes sales tax revenues in urban renewal areas (URAs) and in downtown development areas, the latter not relevant to the station area site but potentially applicable to historic downtown Littleton (described later). Sales tax increases may be deposited into a special fund and proceeds used to repay debt service for general obligation (tax allocation) and revenue (tax increment) bonds that were issued to finance infrastructure construction. The standard taxing jurisdictions share in these increased sales tax revenues.

New Market Tax Credits and Private Activity Bonds

Census tract characteristics in Littleton do not appear to support the use of the new market tax credit (NMTC). The program permits developers to receive a credit against federal income taxes for eligible investment in census tracts where at least 20 percent of the households reside in poverty, or where median family income does not exceed 80 percent of metropolitan or statewide levels.

However, another source appears to be available. C.R.S. 24-32-1701, et seq. established the private activity bond (PAB) allocation program. A PAB is a tax-exempt bond program under federal tax law giving governments the ability to extend financial support without assuming any financial risk and without the census-based requirements for NMTC financing. As described in “Financing Strategies for Encouraging Infill and Redevelopment,” released by DRCOG in April 2006, “PAB financing can be used for commercial or residential projects and is not limited to infill and redevelopment projects. The jurisdiction assigns an amount of revenue bonding to a project within a cap defined by federal law. Communities too small to have their own allocation of bond funds can apply to the state for portions of the statewide balance. Larger communities have their own allocations. In 2003, Denver’s limit was \$21,013,688. Parker was the smallest community in the region to have its own allocation, which was \$1,028,025. A project sponsor

can use these funds to offset higher costs financing that would not be tax exempt.”

General Improvement Districts

C.R.S. 31-25-601 authorizes cities to organize a GID as a taxing entity with the capacity to finance infrastructure improvements. As a special local political jurisdiction with state authority, a GID may impose property taxes to construct and operate facilities, may issue general obligation and revenue bonds, and may charge fees for services to repay indebtednesses. GID formation occurs upon approval of a service plan during an election of a five- to seven-member board of directors. City Council members serve on this board in an ex officio capacity.

Business Improvement Districts

Business improvement districts (BIDs) may be formed upon receipt of a petition from property owners for the purposes of constructing public improvements and planning, managing, and promoting business and development activity within a designated service district. A BID may impose property assessments and ad valorem taxes. A board of directors may be appointed by the City Council, or the council may serve on the board in an ex officio capacity; alternatively, the board may be elected upon petition or, if more than one-half of the property of the BID is within an area governed by a URA or GID, either of those authorities may serve as the board of directors for the BID.

Special Improvement Districts

Colorado statutes extend assessment powers to municipal SIDs. C.R.S. 31-25-501 permits a city council to form and administer a SID to fund the construction of infrastructure improvements and assess the costs for providing the improvements against property that receives benefits from those improvements. Assessments may be used to repay debt arising from special assessment or general revenue bonds issued by the city, each potentially subject to approval by the electorate. A city may choose to participate in repayment of debt if a determination is made that the city as a whole benefits in part from the improvements constructed within the assessment district.

Other Tools

In addition to these financing tools and mechanisms, the panel recommends use of the following development tools.

Development Agreements

Development agreements represent another mechanism for cities and developers to balance public and private objectives. A development contract is called a redevelopment agreement in a URA. Agreements typically include a project description, a scope of development, implementation timelines, and financial or other obligations applicable to each of the parties; they require approval by the City Council or the URA.

Overlay Zones

An overlay zone is a geographic boundary within which specialized controls, guidelines, and regulations may be imposed over underlying zoning to influence the outcome of development where specialized conditions or public objectives are present. Examples relevant to the development sites include site and building design goals to promote sustainable development, protection of the South Platte Park environment, and imposition of specialized parking standards consistent with transit access and ridership. Specialized design review or exemptions from design review may be applied when development plans clearly fulfill overlay objectives.

Transfer of Development Rights

A transfer of development rights (TDR) program could be a useful tool, either subject to an overlay zone or as part of a development agreement, to direct the pattern of development away from land that needs protection and toward land where public and private consensus supports more intensive use. A TDR could be a mechanism to create a buffer between new development and South Platte Park; it also could be used to increase densities selectively in other locations, to add value and create incentives to privately finance public infrastructure improvements.

Comprehensive Plan Rewrite

The changing demographics of Littleton indicate a maturing community. Many older residents con-

tinue to live in large homes. Housing costs are high, and new homeownership opportunities are limited. Regional growth patterns, including tech industry employment centers, have contributed to the establishment of new communities well beyond the original urban core. Congestion and commuting time have increased considerably.

The Comprehensive Plan Rewrite provides an opportunity to evaluate citywide trends and opportunities to protect existing neighborhoods, focusing new mixed-use development in locations where land use and building characteristics and available infrastructure and other public facilities can accommodate sustainable growth patterns while the integrity of established neighborhoods is maintained.

Reuse of Existing Retail Centers

The panel has been made aware that some Littleton residents question the need for new retail centers. Individuals have asserted that it is important to improve faltering shopping areas, instead of encouraging new retail development that may accelerate the decline of existing business.

The panel believes that some of these original shopping centers may be candidates for new mixed-use development communities, with residential uses constructed above retail and close to existing and new neighborhood services. New residential development can create rehousing opportunities for current residents of large single-family homes who may desire smaller living spaces; it can also create other opportunities for mixed-income first-time homebuyers. Urban renewal areas and other district designations may ease land use transitions. The panel recommends defining principles and policies to promote adaptive use and mixed-use development where older centers can be restored to productive use.

Historic Downtown Littleton

The panel recommends that the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite consider mechanisms to restore Littleton's historic downtown to its original prominence. Comprehensive revitalization through practices such as forming a downtown development authority should be considered, to support positive trends and to coordinate private and public initiatives. Neighborhood retail and infrastruc-

ture should get continued attention. Low- and moderate-income housing should be preserved, and mixed-use pedestrian-oriented development encouraged.

Comprehensive Strategies

The panel recommends that the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite review Littleton's land use and development practices from hometown and regional perspectives. Changing demographics and transit availability offer land use and preservation opportunities not available 25 years ago. Sustainable and mixed-use development practices may have citywide application. Business retention and expansion may be augmented with new efforts to attract green technology and expanded medical uses, particularly as new office space becomes available. Neighborhood protection may need to be addressed through design, and new density guidelines, rehabilitation, and traffic calming measures may be essential.

Public Participation Process

The Comprehensive Plan Rewrite is an opportunity to advance good design, appropriate density, and sustainable development through public participation and education. The panel recommends extending the public participation process that accompanies the Comprehensive Plan Rewrite into practices that foster ongoing community attention to protecting and improving Littleton's future, particularly with attention to changing land use, density and design, traffic and transportation, and environmental quality.

Conclusion

Littleton is at a unique moment in its history. With almost all the developable land in the city completely built out, the station area has some of the most unique and valuable land in the region. It is virtually undeveloped and provides an incredible opportunity to create a vibrant mixed-use TOD. The city has an opportunity to capitalize on a convergence of community needs and strong market dynamics.

A community visioning process for the station area can bring these elements together to create the framework for a location that will foster a sense of place for residents and establish the area's role within the city and the region. The city must take a number of actions to see the realization of a great place at the Mineral Avenue station. First, it must create a development and design framework plan to guide private sector development in a way that helps achieve the community's vision in a more effective and efficient manner and lets developers know what is expected of them. This creates predictability for developers and institutes a clear and understandable process to turn to when disputes arise. Second,

the city must actively set policies for and promote sustainable development practices in the station area. Doing so will continue the city's commitment to sustainable development, enhance and protect the region's natural assets in South Platte Park, and make the development distinct within the region. Finally, the city must create an implementation phasing strategy to set out a clear timeline for the development of the station area.

These are not easy tasks; accomplishing them will require strong leadership and cooperation from all involved parties. The city must step up to identify all community stakeholders and bring everyone to the table. The city's leadership in this process will send a strong signal to the development and investment community that it is serious about wanting a successful development in the Mineral Avenue station area. Although the recommendations set forth by the panel may seem extensive, the panel strongly believes they can be implemented if the city can establish a development and design framework, set policies that encourage sustainable development, use the vast array of financing tools, and follow a strong phasing strategy.

About the Panel

Abe Farkas

*Panel Chair
Portland, Oregon*

Abe Farkas founded the Farkas Group in November 2004 to facilitate sustainable, high-quality urban and university development through public-private partnerships. In 25 years of experience working for public development agencies in cities such as Portland and Eugene, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Fort Wayne, Indiana, he has been engaged in the conception and completion of scores of redevelopment and economic development projects. Sample projects include the Westlake Center in Seattle—a three-block mixed-use project incorporating retail, office, below-grade transit, a monorail, and a public park; the Brewery Blocks in Portland—a five-block sustainable mixed-use project bringing together retail, office, apartments, condos (LEED silver), a performing arts center (LEED platinum), below-grade structured parking, and a streetcar line; and the South Waterfront Central District in Portland—a 40-acre mixed-use development that includes 2,700 housing units (LEED silver), retail, 1.5 million square feet of university research, clinical, and office space (first building is LEED platinum), structured parking, streetcars, an aerial tramway, a neighborhood park, bioswales, and a riverfront greenway.

Farkas is currently working with public and private clients engaged in sustainable urban and university developments along the west coast. Projects include a sustainable mixed-use development in the South Park section of Los Angeles; development of mixed-use strategies for the University of Oregon, and the cities of Tacoma, Gresham, and Salem, Oregon; and sustainable and transit-oriented mixed-use developments on privately held and public sites in Portland, Eugene, Long Beach, California, and Tucson, Arizona.

Farkas has served on the board of the International Economic Development Council and is an active member of the Urban Land Institute, serving on the Public/Private Partnership Council.

Morey Bean

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Founding partner of the Colorado Architecture Partnership, Morey Bean is an architect and planner with design and execution experience ranging from innovative university research parks to new urbanist community design. Colorado's Architect of the Year for 1999, Bean serves on the AIA Colorado Growth Task Force and is an adviser to the mayor of Colorado Springs and the city of Colorado Springs on design matters. He is also the lead architect in the Innovation Center for the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, in cooperation with the Pikes Peak Community Foundation. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects and chair of the Urban Design Committee of the Colorado South chapter of the AIA.

Robert Fazio

Pasadena, California

Robert Fazio is a senior planner with the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA). He has worked in more than 20 project and program areas, promoting sound land use and urban design practices, guiding real estate and market analyses, and securing priority-based project financing. He served CRA/LA as liaison to the City Council and has considerable knowledge of the California Community Redevelopment Law.

Fazio managed a ULI Advisory Services Panel in January 2004. The panel study, sponsored by CRA/LA, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro), the Universal City/North Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, and the

Mid Town North Hollywood Neighborhood Council, examined major TOD potential in the NoHo Arts District. Panel recommendations were central to a request for proposals issued cooperatively by CRA/LA and Metro.

A member of ULI and the American Planning Association, Fazio graduated from the University of Southern California with a master's degree in public administration with an emphasis on urban planning. His bachelor's degree is in geography and urban studies. Recent travel to Orvieto and Rome, Italy, reinforced his commitment to successful place making as a cornerstone for successful community redevelopment.

Karina Ricks

Washington, D.C.

Karina Ricks is chief of citywide transportation planning for the District Department of Transportation (DDOT). Her focus of work is to reunite transportation investments with land use and economic development objectives for long-term growth and revitalization in the District. Ricks came to DDOT from the District of Columbia's Office of Planning, where she served five years as the city's TOD coordinator and as a community planner. Working in the two sister agencies, she has had extensive experience in the integration of land use and transportation planning for economic

revitalization. In her six years with the District, Ricks has served on several city and regional task forces, including the Washington Council of Governments Transportation Policy Board, Metropolitan Policy Development Committee, Brownfields Inter-Agency Task Force, Soil and Water Conservation Board, and Bicycle Master Plan Advisory Committee. Before joining the District government, Ricks' work focused on smart growth and sustainable development nationally at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and included international work with countries in Eastern Europe and Oceania.