



Staff Communication

File #: ID# 17-345, **Version:** 1

Agenda Date: 12/12/2017

Subject:

Overview of Mineral Light Rail Station Area Planning Project

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The intent of the study session is to provide an overview and background on the Mineral Light Rail Station Area planning project: to discuss status and options.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT: The following provides an overview of the progress and steps that have occurred for this project.

- In 2013, the city received a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant through the Regional Transportation District (RTD) and Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) for station area master planning at both the Mineral and the Downtown Littleton light rail stations. The grant required the focus of the study areas and resulting master plans to be a guide for future development and redevelopment of the station areas using transit oriented development (TOD) principles. The intent of the project was to establish master plans for these areas.
- The FTA grant awarded for the Mineral Light Rail Station planning was \$75,000 with a \$18,750 match by the city.
- In 2014, a contract between RTD and the city was established for the two station areas planning projects. During the same timeframe, an Urban Land Institute Technical Advisory Panel was convened to assess the Mineral Light Rail station. The recommendation of this panel was to add a parking structure to the station to “free up land for high quality urban development to include residential and retail.”
- In 2015, the city bid the project and hired the firm of Progressive Urban Management Associates (PUMA) for the projects. The Mineral Station Area master planning was to start first.
- In 2016, PUMA began the Mineral Light Rail Station Master Plan project. Two main tasks that were to be part of the project - undertake a market assessment of the Mineral Station area, and ensure the project and content of the plan is vetted through a thorough community engagement process.
- The Mineral Station Area Market Assessment was completed by PUMA in May 2016. It provided analysis of the area for future development and-redevelopment. One of the main outcomes of this analysis indicated that there was not the market pressure for redevelopment of the Mineral Station Light Rail property in this market cycle.
- The community engagement process included formation of a steering committee with representatives from RTD, DRCOG, City Council, Planning Commission, Wolhurst Landing residential neighborhood, Aspen Grove shopping center, and South Suburban Parks and Recreation District. Two open houses and two community public meetings were held between March and August 2016, and community input also was received via on-line. PUMA began a working document to form the basis for a Mineral

Station Area Master Plan.

- Community Development staff presented an overview to Planning Commission on all of the community comments provided on the project to date, in November 2016. During this study session with Planning Commission, commissioners reiterated to staff to ensure the content of the plan took direction from the community input. The main themes of the community input included the following:
 - There was agreement that traffic and parking were major concerns (primarily the traffic congestion at the intersection of Mineral and Santa Fe, and about lack of parking at the park-n-ride at the Mineral Light Rail station, which is generally full by 7am each weekday).
 - There also was majority agreement that recreation access, the South Platte Park and the Mary Carter Greenway, were very important community assets. The recreational connections, the park and regional trail are of utmost importance to the community - from east of the railroad to the western neighborhoods bordering the park.
 - Differences of opinion and ideas were vast regarding future land uses and possible densities.
- Staff began to assess the working document against community input. Public comments indicated it was difficult for community members to provide constructive input for future development and redevelopment within the station area, without a clear understanding of the future traffic and parking impacts (how would a road expansion of the intersection of Mineral and Santa Fe impact the light rail station, and how would an expansion of the light rail line to Lucent impact parking needs at the Mineral Station). The scope of the working document was unable to address the underlying issues of community concern around traffic and parking.
- In early 2017, RTD underwent an audit of the FTA grant funding program. The city had several meetings with RTD, and in early October, 2017, RTD informed the city that they have revised their contractual procedures. As a result RTD must establish a new Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for the Mineral Light Rail Station Area planning project, and will fund the awarded grant amount for the planning project with non-federal funds. The city anticipates receiving the draft IGA from RTD in the next couple of weeks (mid-December).

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION: Through the process to date, the following items have been identified that have or will have influence on the Mineral Light Rail Station planning area.

- Future solutions for the traffic and parking issues will impact the Mineral Station property.
 - How will a road expansion of the intersection of Mineral and Santa Fe impact the Mineral Station property and current light rail station configuration?
 - How will an extension of the light rail line to Lucent impact parking needs at Mineral Station?

There are other significant processes getting underway for determining these answers. As an example, the city has initiated a “Planning and Environmental Linkage” (PEL) study with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and other stakeholders for South Santa Fe (Hwy 85) and including the Santa Fe and Mineral intersection. The ultimate design of the interchange and resulting “footprint” will likely impact the property in size and configuration.

In addition, RTD is continuing to pursue the extension of the light rail line from the Mineral Avenue Station to a proposed Lucent Station. This extension and timeframe will influence the future parking needs at the Mineral Station. CDOT’s PEL project will have to consider the future impacts and timing of the Lucent extension.

- The South Platte Park and the Mary Carter Greenway are very important community assets. The location of the Mineral Station is adjacent to the South Platte Park and Mary Carter Greenway, and the

station serves as the primary entrance to access the Carson Nature Center. The proximity of the Mineral Station to these key recreational amenities for Littleton provides an opportunity for the future of the station area that is unique to all of the other stations in the RTD light rail system.

- The Mineral Station Area Market Assessment concluded that there is not market pressure for redevelopment of the Mineral Station property in this market cycle.
- Existing land uses surrounding the Mineral Station are well established and include recreation (west), commercial (immediately to the north), and residential neighborhoods to the north, south, east and west.
- The city adopted development design principles for this area of Littleton in 2000 (*South Platte River Corridor Development Design Objectives*) and these objectives are in place to ensure character is maintained with any future development in this area.

In staff's opinion it may be premature at this time to establish a master plan for directing future development and redevelopment of the station area. Based on the above items, however, there is an opportunity to create a plan that identifies actionable steps to establish a baseline of expectations and framework for future decision-making for this area of the city.

The preliminary conclusion is to use this planning project to create a plan with actionable steps that the city and community can use to support future decision-making on transportation; recreation/parks, open space and trails; land uses; and character and design, for this part of the city.

OPTIONS/ALTERNATIVES: Based on the project and process to date, two options are outlined for council to consider. There may also be a third option or alternative that comes out of the study session that council would like to consider.

1. Do not continue to pursue the planning project for the Mineral Light Rail Station area.

The con to this approach is that community direction and input will not be captured in a station area plan. The city also received funding from RTD/DRCOG for the project and not finishing a plan may be a negative for Littleton to receive future grants from either entity.

2. Direct staff to work on a draft plan for the Mineral Light Rail Station area that provides direction and guidance for future decision-making in this area of the city. The scope of the plan would be to use the community input as the basis of the project and provide short term and longer term actionable steps to help inform future decision-making for this part of the city with respect to transportation, recreation/parks, open space and trails, land uses, and character and design.

The pro to this approach is that a plan will be created for the Mineral Station Area with actionable steps to establish a baseline of expectations and framework for future discussions and decision-making for this area of the city.

If option 2 is the direction council supports, staff would propose a timeframe of January to March, 2018 to complete the project, and would include the following tasks:

- Hold a study session with Planning Commission (tentatively scheduled for January 9th) to review the outline and content for a draft plan.
- Based on direction and outcomes from that study session, a community meeting will be held (tentatively on January 25th) to discuss the draft plan for the Mineral Station Area, to solicit community feedback and input. Information on the draft plan will also be posted on Open Littleton to provide another venue for community input.
- Upon compiling all the community input, a final draft plan will be scheduled before Planning Commission and then City Council for review, recommendation and adoption (tentatively a February-March timeframe.)