

DRAKE VISIONING PROJECT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives

- ⇒ Develop vision and values to assist decision makers in planning future land use for the Drake Power Plant site.
- ⇒ Learn from other decommissioning projects and communities.
- ⇒ Develop possibilities for future planning.
- ⇒ Validate vision and values through a broad community input process.
- ⇒ Provide broad recommendations for decision makers to consider as changes at Drake occur.

Summary from Phase One:

The initial information and input process for the Community Visioning Project was designed to assess other large-scale urban repurposing projects, to ensure active participation from multiple constituents, and to develop key guiding principles and values for the project. CommuniCon, Inc. was retained by The Legacy Institute to do this work and later the work was jointly overseen by The Legacy Institute and Downtown Partnership.

- 1. Case Studies:** CommuniCon staff conducted an environmental scan on large-scale, international projects that involved repurposing decommissioned power plants and/or industrial centers. The research identified six case studies to be considered.
- 2. Individual Interviews:** Consultants conducted over 20 individual interviews with community representatives who were asked to review the case studies and help provide feedback on what would be highly desirable for the site. Interviews informed next steps for public input and key questions for consideration.
- 3. Focus Groups to Identify Guiding Principles and Values:** Community members from multiple sectors, including private business, nonprofit, military, and civic sectors, were invited to participate in focus groups to help determine guiding principles and values for the community visioning project. Four, one-hour, virtual focus groups were conducted the week of March 17-23, 2021, with 16 attendees. Multiple principles and values were identified.
- 4. Formation of Drake Visioning Oversight Task Force:** Downtown Partnership and The Legacy Institute jointly formed the Drake Visioning Oversight Task Force. The task force is composed of 16 community members, charged with reviewing community and expert input, conducting site visits, and participating in a comprehensive visioning process.
- 5. Neighborhood Focus Groups:** Community listening sessions were scheduled at Greenway Flats and the Hillside Community Center in September 2021. There were 15 participants and three facilitators. Purpose of the focus groups was to gather information from those living closest to the Drake site, but attendance was not

restricted. Findings of these sessions determined that there are some significant differences in priorities from local neighborhoods, in comparison to other focus groups and interviews. Specifically, neighbors close to the Drake site view the power plant as historically having had more of an impact on their neighborhood and any development potentially having more of an impact on their neighborhood than other parts of the City. Individuals living in the Mill Street neighborhood were active participants in the focus groups and other public input processes. The task force members and consultants understood and valued that input.

6. **Charette:** A half-day charette was conducted with 17 community leaders to help generate ideas and possibilities to be taken to the public. Participants represented higher education, the arts, nonprofits, commercial and residential development, and civic leaders.

Steps 1-6 were conducted by CommuniCon, Inc., under the direction of The Legacy Institute and Downtown Partnership.

7. **Values and Guiding Principles:** Based on all information gathered, the task force created values and guiding principles for the redevelopment of the Drake property.
 - ◆ **PEOPLE** we value the dignity of all people through an inclusive, welcoming, and collaborative place.
 - ◆ **DESIGN** we value design that honors the surrounding neighborhoods' character while being both bold and ambitious and befitting of the heart and soul of our community.
 - ◆ **ENVIRONMENT** we value the environment by being stewards of the setting, restoring, and sustaining the water, land, air, and life.
 - ◆ **ECONOMICS** we value economics with a commitment to financial equity, feasibility, and long-term sustainability.

Summary from Phase Two:

1. **Categorize Alternatives:** Taking into consideration all data and information gathered from case studies, individual interviews, focus groups, and the strategic charette, the task force members and the CommuniCon team including technical consultants identified categories of possibilities for the public to consider: Community Centers, Housing, Environmental Innovations, Work Experiences, Outdoor Activities, Water Destinations, Pedestrian Experiences and Mobility Options. Sixteen images reflecting possibilities in each category were vetted by task force members to be presented to the public. No images were utilized from Colorado Springs.

2. Public Input Meetings: Six public meetings were held over a three-week period in October, 2022, one in each City Council district. A random sample mailing invite was sent to 31,396 households of registered voters within the City of Colorado Springs. Meetings were posted through the public library system and advertised through resources of The Legacy Institute, Downtown Partnership and task force members. Total number of participants in the public visioning sessions was 171. Participant breakdown was as follows:

Banning Lewis Ranch Recreation Center = 3
 Rockrimmon Library = 21
 Ruth Holley Library = 26
 Sand Creek Library = 26
 Library 21c = 35
 Knights of Columbus Hall/PPLD = 60

In addition to the six public meetings, two additional listening sessions were offered in Old Colorado City and the Gold Hill Mesa neighborhood.

Key Findings for Consideration from Public Input Meetings:

- The guiding principles were overwhelmingly endorsed as a foundation to guide future decision making with regard to the Drake site.
- Water is a highly valued resource and asset. There is great consensus that any future plans include valuing, improving, and utilizing the adjacent creek.
- In general, there was no one area of possible use that was preferred over others, but rather a ‘mixed use’ approach which will provide a variety of valued experiences. Overwhelmingly the public favored redevelopment of the site as contrasted to the site remaining in use for a variety of potential utility uses.

The following three considerations were widely mentioned during the public input meetings. While they do not fall within the scope of the Drake Reimagined process, they are important to note.

- There is significant concern about energy resources as Colorado Springs continues to grow. Participants want more information about long-range resource planning from Colorado Springs Utilities.
- Participants are very cognizant of the complex issue of homelessness, particularly in the area surrounding Drake. While many expressed appreciation for surrounding organizations and resources, including Springs Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army, others were concerned about the numbers of homeless in the area and

increased safety issues and related crime. This concern extended beyond the Drake area and was voiced throughout the community.

- Numerous comments urged thoughtful consideration of the Mill Street neighborhood in all planning efforts.

The public input process was conducted by CommuniCon, Inc., with the assistance of technical consultants.

3. Task Force Guiding Principles Revised: Based on small committee work within the task force, the guiding principles were revised and approved by the task force.

- ◆ **PEOPLE** We value the dignity of all people through an inclusive, welcoming, and collaborative place.
 - Site plans shall incorporate broad community feedback with keen attention to neighborhoods and districts in closest proximity.
 - Ensure site partners demonstrate commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion in past performance, proposals and practice.
 - The site shall incorporate housing serving a wide variety of socioeconomic strata.
- ◆ **DESIGN** We value design that is bold and ambitious, befitting the heart of our community.
 - Design shall be alluring, timeless and engaging, incorporating public art and accessible public spaces that inspire and delight.
 - A site master plan shall demonstrate understanding of, and respect for, those existing master plans most relevant to the area: City of Colorado Springs Parks Master Plan, Creek COS, Mill Street Neighborhood Master Plan, and the Experience Downtown Master Plan.
 - Design shall reflect respect for the site edges – namely Fountain Creek to the west and the Mill Street and City Gate neighborhoods to the east.
- ◆ **ENVIRONMENT** We value the environment by being stewards of the setting: restoring and sustaining the water, land, air, and life.
 - Fountain Creek shall be integrated and celebrated as an exceptional site attribute.
 - The site’s built environment, landscaping and mobility options shall adhere to high environmental sustainability standards for the present and future.
 - Industries and uses that are not energy/fuel-efficient shall not be considered.
- ◆ **ECONOMICS** We value sound economics, knowing this place must demonstrate financial sustainability in order to live out its values and achieve its goals.
 - The site shall leverage its unique economic attributes of proximity to the intersection of I-25 and Highway 24; adjacency to Fountain Creek; and its rail line.

- The site's economic potential shall be measured both directly through sales and property taxes generated and indirectly through fulfillment of community, housing, and workforce needs.
- Public-private partnerships and diverse funding sources that allow for financial feasibility are encouraged.
- Recognizing that the site is publicly owned, any future use or ownership agreements must be accountable to the values and principles herein and as identified by Colorado Springs Utilities.

4. Task Force Recommendations to Guide Decisions: Taking into consideration all data from the public input process, including additional comments provided in the meetings and via email, the task force convened to determine key recommendations to guide future decisions. Twenty-two recommendations were considered. It was acknowledged that full environmental considerations were not available at the time of the development of the recommendations.

- 1) Adopt the guiding principles and values of the task force to be upheld throughout the entire process, from visioning to execution.
- 2) Ensure decisions about land use are consistent with other approved community-based plans.
- 3) Include in some form and scale a world-class attraction/recreation component.
- 4) Aggressively pursue federal and state dollars as part of a diverse mix of funding sources while learning from the best practices of public-private funding mechanism of other cities.
- 5) Integrate recommendations with the COS Creek Plan making water an essential part of any plan.
- 6) Include an innovative industry component (workplaces, retail/commercial, company headquarters, etc.).
- 7) Create an ongoing community advisory group that includes broad representation from the task force, neighborhoods, business community, nonprofit sector, and underrepresented communities.
- 8) Utilize affordable housing tools and resources to incorporate a variety of inventive housing options creating a wide range of housing options for the site.