

**DATE:** 10/28/2020  
**TIME:** 3:00-5:00 PM  
**RE:** Planning and Development Subcommittee Meeting  
**ATTENDEES:** Tom Fleming, Diane Jones, Troy Bliss, Jason Licon, Aaron Ehle, Josh Birks, Kelly Jones, Adam Crowe, Scott Shipley

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### **Begin Meeting Record 10/28/2020**

#### **Agenda Item #1: Meeting Minutes Review, September 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- Tom: The minutes state a corridor streetscape plan will require coordination with adjacent landowners and that Commission direction is needed to move forward. What direction are we looking for?
  - Several topics were discussed (economic development, corridors, redevelopment, sustainability) and we need to get a better idea of what the priorities are. A better understanding of the Commission's vision for a corridor improvement plan is needed.
- **Diane moved to approve the minutes. The motion, seconded by Josh passed unanimously.**

#### **Agenda Item #2: Strategic Initiative – Economic Development**

- Economic development is one of the five focus areas of FNL's 2018 Strategic Plan. The PDSC is working to define the Airport's role and objectives within the regional economic development context. For today's discussion, economic development professionals from the area will join us to share their perspectives on how the Airport fits into the regional economic development strategy, and how it can participate in cluster development activities.
- Diane: We're looking for ways that the Airport and Airport Influence Area (AIA) can be better integrated into regional economic development plans.
- Josh: The Airport can be a major economic asset. How do we help it reach its potential?  
Question for participants – What is your department focused on and what are your top economic development priorities?
  - Kelly Jones – City of Loveland: The Airport is an extremely strong asset. We need to put more tools (Customs, foreign trade zone, enterprise zone) around the Airport, so it becomes even more attractive for businesses that we want to target. Attracting aviation/aerospace primary jobs should be a main goal. Light industrial, manufacturing, and technology make sense in the area around the Airport. There isn't much money available for attracting new businesses, most of the time and effort is spent on retention right now. The Airport also has the potential to support tourism in the region.
  - Adam Crowe – Larimer County: Strong regional collaboration (Larimer and Weld Counties) is starting to occur through the Northern Colorado Regional Economic Development Initiative (NoCo REDI) with a focus on business attraction. Many requests for information involve Airport and interstate access. An enterprise zone may be worth exploring.

- Scott Shorling: Economic development is already happening in the area. Many large development projects are happening near the Airport. We might want to look at how special district financing can help solve some of the infrastructure issues.
- Josh: Fort Collins Economic Health focuses primarily on business support and works with entrepreneurs. Tourism is managed by a separate entity. Colorado is not a state that is well equipped to attract businesses. Fort Collins and other northern Colorado communities are under-resourced when it comes to attraction. Northern Colorado has traditionally benefitted from being a desirable location with high quality of life and reasonable operating costs.
- Jason: Are there other factors besides funding for economic development that put northern Colorado at a disadvantage for attracting and retaining businesses?
  - Kelly: Cost of housing is becoming an issue. Also, the region doesn't have a critical mass of large employers. This can mean a lack of opportunities for spouses who are also seeking employment.
  - Josh: Northern Colorado is a wide, but shallow market. Some people may be hesitant to take a job in mid-upper level management, because if it doesn't work out, there isn't the depth of opportunity to move to a similar job with another company. When you put Larimer and Weld Counties together, the market is deeper, which emphasizes the importance of regional cooperation.
  - Adam: Northern Colorado still lacks a cohesive message and brand. We don't have a lot of high-profile large employers. Access to labor is another factor for new and expanding companies. Some industries are experiencing skill gaps and labor shortages.
- Diane: Are you seeing any changes due to COVID-19 and the fact that many people are working from home and don't need to live near an office?
  - Adam: It's probably too early to say how some of those trends may develop. We have some sectors and employers that are growing and fighting hard to bring on staff and they are facing some new challenges in addition to the old ones. Child care is an issue for people who can't work remotely. A lot of the people who have been laid-off are lower-skilled workers who likely need training to be able to fill some of the higher-skilled positions.
- Tom: What kinds of skills are lacking in the workforce?
  - Adam: There have always been some shortages and skill gaps in the technology industry. The ones that are more concerning right now are in trades such as construction. Manufacturing is facing some challenges and the skills of people working in the industry may not transfer to other types of manufacturing. Research is being conducted to identify skill gaps and transferability. Some of the trade schools are seeing high numbers of people leaving before their training is finished because their skills are in high demand. There may be a need to provide some of the basic training without expecting people to go through a

- full program, so they have the basic skills to enter the workforce. More companies are starting to spend more on training their own staff and we need to explore ways to provide assistance for this type of training.
- Kelly: There needs to be more apprenticeship or internship programs to train people on the job, because trade schools can't keep up with innovation and individual business needs.
  - Josh: What are your thoughts on the Northern Colorado Regional Cluster Strategy and what are the key areas of collaboration among the region's partners? How is that context important for FNL?
    - Kelly: If Weld and Larimer Counties can build a message and brand for the region, we can start going after some of the vertical markets that we excel in. The Airport will be one of the stops on the tour when we are showing people what the region has to offer.
    - Josh: The new study took a regional approach and reached some different conclusions than the individual communities had in the past. The study identified 6 industries that are strong and have high growth potential. This allow us to develop a narrowly-focused strategy instead of trying to be everything to everybody. Fort Collins is more focused on supporting these industries through retention and expansion, but other communities may focus on different aspects building out these clusters.
  - Tom: What are the six identified clusters.?
    - Josh: Information Technology, Manufacturing: Production and Fabrication, Bioscience + Medical Devices, Plastics, Distributions and Ecommerce, Food Processing and Manufacturing. The study provides a lot of information, but the next step is to develop a strategy to support the growth of targeted industries. COVID-19 has complicated and slowed the development of a strategy.
  - Tom: Colorado has the second highest number of jobs per capita in Aerospace and Defense? What are the opportunities for the region?
    - Josh: Most of this activity is concentrated in Denver, Boulder, Colorado Springs. As those markets get more expensive for businesses to locate and operate, other markets will become more attractive, but we don't have nearly the concentration of talent that these areas do, which creates a disadvantage.
    - Diane: A solid brand and message for the region is vitally important to our economic development efforts.
    - Josh: NoCo REDI is working to formulate a message/brand and to disseminate it in an effective fashion.
  - Jason: We've talked a lot about what the public sector is doing. What is the role of the private sector in economic development for the region?
    - Josh: The private sector should be easily able to plug into the network that is being developed. Private entities have expressed interest in fundraising and marketing. We will be relying on the private sector to verify what the data tells us and to provide nuance. One of

- the most important roles for the private sector is advocacy regarding business costs and operating issues related to regulation.
- Kelly: I wish the private sector would know to get a hold of us for leads. They are tied into supply chains and know where the gaps are. We need to be able to communicate more effectively to share ideas and context.
  - Diane: A meeting with business leaders should be arranged and they should be asked how they see their roles and how partnerships can be formed.
  - Josh: COVID-19 has created an environment where we're trying to minimize damage, but we need to look beyond the immediate response and create a long-term recovery/growth plan. The crisis has brought the regional economic development entities closer together, which should provide a good foundation for the future.
  - Josh: How do you view the Airport and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
    - Adam: Areas that have been successful in attracting businesses have airports. A lot of companies won't consider an area without an airport. Bringing commercial air service back will be very important for business and tourism. The more the Airport develops, the more attractive the region will be.
    - Kelly: Most people discover how great northern Colorado is by taking a vacation here or visiting relatives.
    - Josh: A recent survey found that the majority of CEOs and site selectors have reported that their first experience with Colorado was on vacation. People who don't live in Colorado generally don't know much about the state except for Denver and the ski towns. Tourism is a good avenue for educating people about the strengths of the region.
  - Diane: The Airport Influence Area (AIA) is primarily zoned as industrial, which allows for a wide range of land uses. How do we attract the types of development we would like to see and what tools are missing?
    - Kelly: Outside of cash and incentives the tools are limited. Only a small area around the Airport would qualify for an enterprise zone. To a large extent market factors will determine what gets built around the Airport, unless the zoning is changed.
    - Diane: A zoning overlay could be created, but the political will might not exist.
    - Troy: A zoning overlay is possible, but there are a lot of factors that need to be considered.
    - Jason: One thing we'd like to do is get people from the Airport to the communities through attractive corridors that create a positive impression.
    - Scott: Development costs are constraining development of the available parcels in the AIA. The last developments in an area often get stuck with a disproportionate share of the transportation improvement costs. The City's Transportation department is investigating changes to these policies to spread out the cost-sharing.

- Troy: One of the reasons Discovery Air is phasing their development is to avoid costly improvements to the intersection of Earhart Rd and Byrd Dr.
- Closing thoughts:
  - Josh: How does the Airport become an integrated and functional asset within the regional economic development strategy.
    - Kelly: The Airport is already an important aspect of our economic development strategy. I'd like to see more tools and branding/marketing, but I think we're doing a good job.
    - Adam: We need to be looking at how we can better support the Airport. How the Airport fits into the branding of the region will be important.
    - Scott: Some of the trends associated with COVID-19 may favor suburban markets over urban markets.
  - Jason: Two main points that resonated:
    - Branding: working together to form a common vision and goals. Branding is the main reason the Name of the Airport was changed. Nationally, most people aren't familiar with Loveland and Fort Collins. Northern Colorado provides more geographical context, but also represents the region, not just the two cities.
    - Commercial air service: has the ability to create more economic development opportunities. A direct link to the region is important, but there are some infrastructure issues that need to be resolved. How are we going to improve the corridors to elevate the impression of the Airport, Cities, and Region?
  - Tom: One of the things that wasn't mentioned much was innovation. Cherry Creek School district has an innovation center at Centennial Airport. Are there opportunities for a similar center here? This could complement just about every aspect of economic development and highlight technical expertise in the region.
    - Jason: The Airport is ideally located between Loveland, Fort Collins, Windsor, and Greeley.
    - Kelly: There are some other incubators and technology/innovation centers in the region, but one focused on aviation makes sense.
    - Josh: Transportation to the Airport could be an issue. It's hard to get different cities/districts to agree on a location. Aims Community College is an important asset and could provide some interesting opportunities
    - Diane: One of the differentiators we have is the remote tower. We should investigate partnership opportunities and look at developing a remote tower training facility.

**End Meeting Record**