

From: Congress Park Neighbors Inc.
To: Denver City Council
Re: East Central Area Plan
October 2 2020

Dear Council Members,

The Congress Park Board would like to present a few comments and concerns about the East Central Area Plan (ECAP), process, and its unanswered lingering questions after this three year process.

Our once peaceful neighborhood was left hurt and divided by a roll out of the plan graphics in late June 2019. Neighbors became alarmed after seeing a “High Comfort Bikeway” designated in front of their houses on Detroit Street. With no document information on what this proposed “Bikeway” was, they suspected the worst; a newly widened street with trees and parking removed. These neighbors contacted Public Works (DOTI) for clarity about the location and details of what was planned. DOTI could not clearly present reasons supporting their survey data or bikeway details, which caused additional neighbors to become increasingly alarmed.

This alarm culminated in a Congress Park Neighbors Safe Streets meeting where over 200 residents attended to learn more about the “Bikeway”. Again DOTI could not clearly explain their reasoning or design for this bikeway and neighbors began to argue amongst themselves with pro-bicyclists yelling “Blood will be on your hands”, and older residents returning comments that they needed their parking and cars. This further escalated into mass emails from Denver bicyclists supporting the bikeway and residents pushing back for the lane removal.

This battle continued on Facebook and NextDoor, with members being harassed and others banned from the media. It also spilled over into resident homes being vandalized and neighbors contacting police with reports of harassment, threats, and stalking. Our RNO paid for off duty police to attend our sponsored ECAP Workshops because our residents felt unsafe. Some residents contacted the District Attorney and mediation services to try and resolve some of these issues, which continue to this day.

In a later ECAP draft, a more clear explanations of the proposed bikeway recommendation was presented in a new “Neighborhood Bikeway” sub-category with photo exhibits. Unfortunately, this divisive issue has taken a toll on our community and while this planning process may end, our neighborhood discontent continues and may never be the same.

Other unanswered questions involve the Colfax BRT and possible alternate stops in Congress Park. The Colfax Connects Planning Team suggested possible alternate stops and was expecting this extensive ECAP planning process to provide input and guidance for them. This topic was not brought up or discussed in the neighborhood or public meetings.

The Colfax Corridor is planned around the center-running BRT. This plan will disrupt current traffic patterns, limit left turns, and impact 14th Ave. with diverted vehicle flow. The mobility plan also, recommends a protected bicycle lane on 14th Ave. and this area has some of the highest densities and need for parking in the neighborhood. Residents have requested CPD release the parking survey data collected in this area, along with existing and proposed traffic studies on the BRT, to understand if the proposed ECAP recommendations make sense.

Further questions have been raised about the ECAP Maximum Building Heights exhibit and other corridor mapping. CPD has done extensive property analysis along Colfax but due to the scale of these drawing it is difficult to determine which specific properties are being selected for incentives. The Planning Board also commented on this. Also, due to the small size, it is unclear if the commercial incentivized properties have been enlarged to include adjacent residential lots.

Residential neighbors living in architecturally significant homes adjacent to the Paradise Cleaners parking lot, recently became aware the current U-MS-3 zoning, has a proposed incentivized recommendation of 8 stories. They oppose this recommendation and feel their property has lost value and don’t understand why this parking lot 3’ from their home has an 8-story recommendation while other similar parking lots along Colfax are incentivized to 5-stories. We have no clear understanding of how these decisions have been made and CPD has been unwilling to disclose or discuss this.

These selected and studied incentivized properties, have also been modeled for massing and scale. Adjacent residential neighbors have requested sun/shadow studies of these proposed heights, so they can understand the impact on their

properties. These 3D models were not presented at the workshops, and neighbors were unable to view or comment on these incentivized building heights. The neighbors would like to see these 3D buildings with sun/shadow studies and be able to voice their opinions on this topic. Again, this map is difficult to read and few people understand what they are viewing or how it is being changed. A more thoughtful approach, might include a map showing which property heights are changing and by how much. An increased height of 2 or 3-stories on a 5-story building is large but a 3-story height to 8-stories, especially adjacent to residential homes is quite different.

This planning process has become much more difficult due to the outbreak of COVID19, the city shutdown and retooling for virtual meetings. These changes have not allowed for equal access for many of our less tech savvy residents and has even provided challenges for knowledgeable. New methods of outreach need to be devised and implemented for equitable access for all residents. This may take some time.

The plan includes many good recommendations but drastically falls short on topics the city did not wish to discuss or review. Some form of oversight maybe in order to prevent future planning gaps and/or a clearly defined neighborhood planning process. Pre-planning might include required coordination with neighborhood groups six months prior to the plan commencing to establish communication lines and discuss specific needs and concerns for those neighborhoods.

We ask you to give us time to work with cooperative city partners, who will sit down with our neighborhoods to resolve these and other questions. Our hope for this planning process was a seat at the table where we could gather information together, possibly find consensus, and make informed decisions based on quality information and extensive community engagement.

We also hope in future NPI planning, this process can be used to build community, educate, work to find neighborhood consensus on innovative growth ideas, and continue to build trust with community planning and our city leadership.

Respectfully,

Congress Park Board Of Directors

Victoria Eppler, President

cc: Curt Upton, Scott Robinson, Laura Aldrete