

Meeting of the Planning Commission, March 08, 2016

Notes taken by Nancy Young

HEADLINES

- Arvada Triangle development plan approved - Fare-thee-well (again) to favorite businesses; Arvada's rich history discarded – again
- Parks (etc.) Master Plan approved - is there enough water?

6:30 pm Commissioners present were Hannan, Goff, Sullivan, Rothschild and Connell. Commissioners Caswell and Crouse were excused. Citizens present - about 37.

Dutch Bros. Coffee, 8399 Ralston Road (NE corner, Ralston & Carr) was vacated on a vote of 5-0. The vacated application requested rezoning and a Preliminary Development Plan (PDP).

Arvada Triangle development - Preliminary Development Plan (PDP); now renamed “Shops at Ralston Creek”

The posting requirements were met and there were no changes to the staff report.

NOTE: At the Arvada Urban Renewal Committee Board meeting on March 2, there was an extensive discussion of a requirement, included in the staff report to be submitted to the Planning Commission, for a shared bike/right-turn lane on Independence/Ralston at the traffic signal on the north end of this project. This requirement was not mentioned in the staff report available to the Planning Commission.

Jim Loftus (the developer) and Tim Van Meter (architect) presented an overview of the project. The area will encompass about 4 acres at the corner of Independence/Ralston and Ralston/W. 58th, known for decades as the Arvada Triangle.

This Phase I project will include 4 new buildings with 30,000 sq. ft. of restaurant/retail space. The existing buildings, including the former Safeway (now part of Phase II), will be demolished by the end of May to make the area look more appealing to potential new tenants. The new buildings will be 1-2 stories, with glass fronts on three sides, and plain walls/grease traps/heating, ventilating and cooling (HVAC) facing an interior court. The project provides 5 parking spaces per 1,000 sq. ft. of retail - the Planning Department requirement.

There will be a plaza at the corner, with space for restaurants to have outdoor dining patios facing the street. This “space” will be buffered from traffic by planters.

Architect Tim Van Meter noted that “there will be a whole lot of good food” in this development. Later, Mr. Loftus stated that the ultimate users are unknown, but they will probably not all be restaurants. He hopes that potential tenants will include businesses that require fewer parking spaces than restaurants, thus balancing the parking needed at any one time.

Some buildings will have rooftop decks with “peak-to-peak” views to the west and south. The architect emphasized the dining possibilities of some of the buildings being 2-stories with rooftop decks.

Public Comment:

- One citizen opposed the application, stating that the proposal removed the “peak-to-peak” views now enjoyed by ALL citizens. In the future, only “paying customers” would be able to enjoy such views. Overall, the proposal is not good for the neighborhood character of Arvada. Other points made:
- Existing, successful businesses at the Arvada Square will have to pay 4-6 times their current rent in the new development, while an “uplift” of the Arvada Square would be less costly and would retain successful, taxpaying businesses.
- The Commission’s packet was incomplete. Loftus held a public meeting on May 27, 2015, which was not mentioned in the packet. At that meeting, at least 75 citizens attended (based on a headcount before the meeting began), and more citizens arrived after that headcount. There were possibly 100, or more, citizens at that meeting.
- At the May 27 meeting (not mentioned in the Commission packet), residents expressed concern about parking and traffic generated by the new businesses. With popular chains like Starbucks, 10-15 parking spaces would be a normal need; this proposal only includes 5 spaces. As a result, the overflow would park in nearby neighborhoods.
- Also, on May 27, it was noted that the Triangle area contains an historic asset - the original Ralston Road (characterized as a “wagon road” in the packet) that curved at today’s Holland Street (graphic map presented). The developer stated during the meeting that it might be a good idea to retain this historic asset, a contributor to neighborhood character (the same statement made at the July meeting noted in the Commission’s packet).
- On May 27 and at the later meeting on July 26, citizens were concerned about the tax subsidy to the developer.
- Many citizens were concerned about high-density housing in this area. These concerns were expressed at both meetings. It was acknowledged that the housing portion of the development is not part of the current application.

In rebuttal, the developer stated that the first meeting was not required. He also stated that he knows nothing about the historic character of Arvada. He claimed that he made no commitment to preserve the historic Ralston road. The developer also stated that his development plans, presented at the May 27 meeting, included graphics illustrating high-density housing that is actually part of Phase II, the Arvada Square project.

Commissioner questions/comments & responses

- Walkable access to this site from the north and east will be provided in Phase II (Arvada Square).
- The “open space” at the corner of Ralston and Independence/Ralston will be smelly and noisy for diners. The architect replied that the “space” will be buffered by planters. Also, a similar situation in Boulder has proven successful.
- Is there a plan to widen Ralston Road prior to this development? Staff response - someday.
- Will this Phase I development attract developer interest in Phase II? Loftus is the developer for both Phase I and Phase II, having signed a contract with Arvada Urban Renewal last November.
- Bike parking in Phase I and Phase II totals 56 spaces.

Motion to recommend approval by City Council passed unanimously, 5-0.

Arvada Parks, Trails and Open Space Master Plan - Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan
Consultant Meredith Wenkowski of DesignWorkshop made the presentation on behalf of the City of Arvada, applicant. The plan has been updated regarding four major “themes”:

- Community: promoting existing park resources, especially through digital and social media; provide additional “wayfinding” resources (like signs); and increase volunteer participation
- Parks: provide new “urban” parks; improve existing parks (especially restrooms); and improve maintenance of existing parks
- Wellness: complete trail gaps and improve connection to community amenities;
- Nature: acquire additional “open space”(citizens’ survey priority) and adopt a formal “open space stewardship plan”

Public Comment

Three citizens spoke in favor of Arvada Parks. There were, however, several concerns noted:

- Water! The Director of Public Utilities has stated that Arvada’s existing water resources can serve up to 120,000-125,000 residents. With already approved residential projects, Arvada has reached that limit.
- Household water-use restrictions, not just landscape restrictions, appear likely this summer since we are experiencing a very dry winter. Summer could bring severe drought conditions. It is uncertain if or when additional water resources will be available. The Gross Reservoir expansion has not yet been permitted, and there is speculation that Boulder will refuse to issue permits. Even if the Gross Reservoir expansion is approved and permitted, construction is estimated to require 4 years. Probably 6-8 years in “real time”. There appears to be little mention of this critical resource in the report, nor of specific conservation efforts by the City of Arvada.
- In publicizing parks (i.e., “activation”), some parks and most open spaces should be excluded to protect them.
- Park fees charged to developers are too low and need to be increased.

NOTE: In 2013, the Planning Commission and subsequently the Arvada City Council, voted to waive park fees for any development within one-half mile of a transit station.

Rebuttal

- On page 114, see discussion of water conservation.
- On page 117, see references to other documents.

Commissioner Questions/Comments

- Will the “no wading” rule (previously unknown to the Commissioner), regarding “no wading” in existing water resources, be continued? Yes.
- Does this plan address the intersection of transportation (i.e., bike routes) and trails? No. Improved north-south connections are addressed.

Motion to approve passed unanimously, 5-0.

Staff updates: the March 22, 2016, Planning Commission meeting will have one item - neighborhood grocer at 64th & Joyce.

7:45 pm (approximately) - Meeting adjourned.