



Project Area Community Assessment

August 2016



INTRODUCTION

The City of Colorado Springs and the NES consultant team are committed to working with Colorado Springs residents and businesses to create a community-based plan to renew the North Nevada Avenue project area. One of the goals for the extensive community involvement process is to combine and consider both technical analysis and the “lived experiences” of people who care about the area. The ultimate goal is to create a plan that is both responsible and responsive.

The first step in the process gathered a wide range of opinions about the project area. It was important to hear and understand community residents’ concerns related to the project area, the opportunities they believe exist now and could exist, and their hopes for the future of the area. This report provides a summary of the responses received through this early step in the planning process.

OUTREACH METHODS

In order to solicit a wide range and volume of opinions, multiple outreach methods were employed. The table below describes each of the outreach methods, the rationale for its use, and the level of participation each generated.

Outreach Method	Rationale	Dates conducted	Number of participants/ respondents
Roundtable discussions with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives from adjacent neighborhoods - Project area business owners and managers - Mobile home park managers in/around the area - Members of business-related groups in the community 	Encouraged informal discussions with and between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representatives of those with the potential to be most impacted by the project - People with knowledge of business/market analysis 	July 11 – July 27	40 participants
Online survey through the City website	Provided equal and widespread opportunity for many to conveniently share their individual perspectives	July 11 – August 15	589 respondents
Community workshop	Offered open, public forum for all who are interested in influencing the plan to provide opinions individually and in small groups	August 3	Approximately 200 participants
Total estimated participants/respondents			829

The following three questions were asked through each of the outreach methods:

What are the biggest challenges for this area?

What are the opportunities you see for this area?

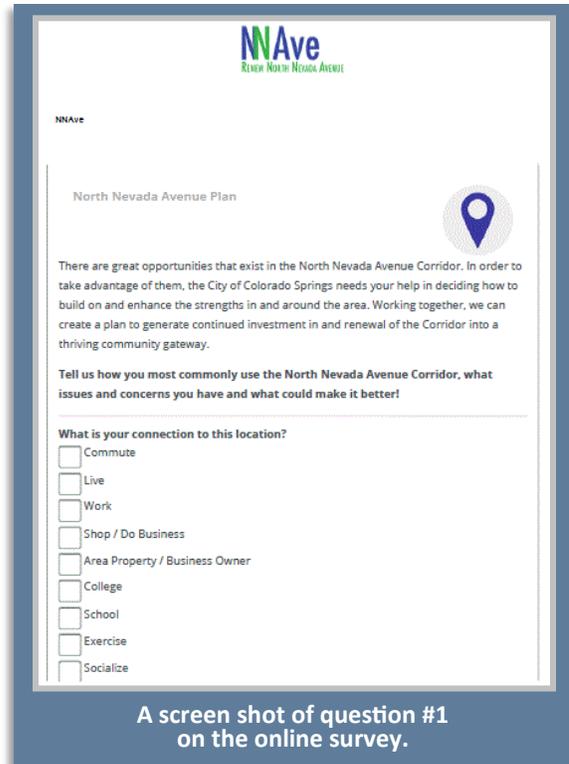
How would you like this area to look and feel 10 years from now?

Following the roundtables and after receiving the first two weeks of survey responses, a preliminary list of challenges, opportunities and elements of a 10-year vision for the area was prepared. That list was shared with those who participated in the August 3 workshop. Workshop participants worked in small groups to identify the two most important challenges, the two most important opportunities in the project area, and any 10-year vision elements that were missing. All participants were also asked individually to identify any challenges or opportunities missing from the list. Additions were made to the preliminary list, based on workshop suggestions and final survey responses. The final list of project area challenges, opportunities, and vision elements can be found on the project website: www.ColoradoSprings.gov/RenewNNAve.

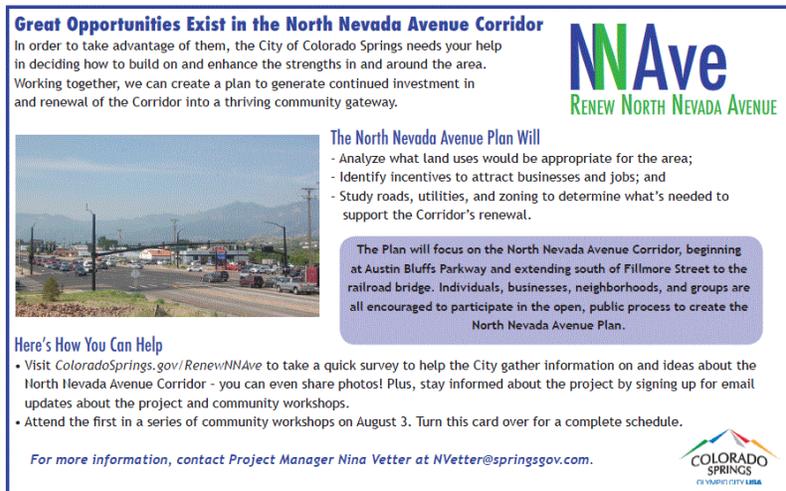
Summary and verbatim reports which document the survey and workshop responses are also posted on the project website, as are the verbatim comments from the roundtables.

A robust communication program was launched in early July to support and promote community participation in creating the plan. The following communication tools were used to make project area residents, businesses, and the Colorado Springs community aware of the project and to encourage their participation in the planning process.

- * A flier providing information about creation of the Renew North Nevada Avenue Plan and detailed information about how to get involved was mailed to approximately 1,500 property owners in the project area;
- * Handouts and posters were hand-delivered to all businesses within the project boundary on North Nevada Avenue;
- * A project page was established on the City of Colorado Springs' website;
- * A news release was distributed to all local news media explaining the project and the community engagement process which resulted in coverage by multiple media outlets;
- * Multiple social media messages were posted on Facebook, Twitter and Next Door; and
- * Distribution of a series of e-newsletters were distributed via email to all participants/survey respondents who provided their email addresses.



A screen shot of question #1 on the online survey.



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Responses gathered through all of the outreach methods were analyzed to identify topics which were consistently mentioned. While all responses were valued and valuable and should be considered as the plan is developed, they have been organized by frequency of mention to identify priorities held by those participating in the process to-date.

CHALLENGES IN THE PROJECT AREA

FIRST TIER CHALLENGES
Transportation
Businesses
Housing
Land Use
SECOND TIER CHALLENGES
Infrastructure
Negative Perception of the Area
Plan Implementation

FIRST TIER CHALLENGES

Transportation: The most-frequently mentioned challenge cited in the roundtables, the survey, and the workshop focused on transportation-related issues in the project area. Traffic volume, both now and in the future, as well as traffic movements and flow were frequently cited as challenges.

“Safely accommodating all transportation modes — high traffic + bikes and pedestrians.”

Access to existing businesses is a challenge, as is the lack of and location of parking. Nevada Avenue serving as a truck route was mentioned, as was the challenge of providing 18-wheel truck access to some businesses along the Avenue. Transit was also frequently raised as a challenge, with many focused on the present lack of access to/from the rest of the community. Others fear transit’s potential impacts on adjacent neighborhoods. The fact that there is an abandoned railroad right-of-way in the project area with an undefined future is considered a challenge by some; uses suggested for its future were a trail, a streetcar route, and a transit route.

Businesses: Businesses were another topic frequently mentioned across all outreach methods. Responses focused on the mix and nature of businesses that exist in the project area, including industrial, manufacturing, diverse retail and historic. Another frequently-mentioned business-related challenge is the impact this planning effort may have on the future of existing businesses. Some business owners in the corridor fear displacement and others are worried about “out-pricing” existing small businesses. Still others are concerned about “fair” treatment of existing businesses in comparison to how new businesses moving into the area might be treated by the City of Colorado Springs.

Housing: Housing was often cited as a challenge facing the area. Many comments related to the lack of/need for a mix of housing that is affordable for all age groups. The lack of UCCS student off-campus housing was mentioned as a challenge, as was the need for mobile home parks as an affordable option for senior residents. Echoing the expressed concerns of existing business owners and/or managers, fear was also expressed about displacing existing residents from their homes and mobile homes.

Land use: Not surprisingly, land use is one of the top-tier challenges consistently mentioned. Many comments focused on the complicated nature of

“Many small parcels of land [are] not easily aggregated to facilitate change-of-use.”

the area because of the many, and often incompatible, land uses that

currently exist in the area. Others cited the issue of private property rights and fear of the impacts of being re-zoned as a result of this project. Concerns with signage and with building height were also raised, as were concerns related to potential negative impacts on adjacent neighborhoods as a result of future land use decisions in the project area.

SECOND TIER CHALLENGES

Infrastructure: Drainage and stormwater run-off were cited frequently as existing infrastructure challenges. The area’s lack of curb, gutter, sidewalks, and bike lanes was also consistently referenced. Some mentioned the need for streetlights and maintenance of existing infrastructure. A few referenced high-capacity broadband capability as an additional infrastructure-related challenge.

Negative perception of the area: Many believe there is a strong negative perception of the area held by others in the Colorado Springs community. Descriptors such as “undefined,” “unattractive,” and “run down” were used. Some reported the difficulty of access and moving around in the area creates a negative perception. Others mentioned the condition of some of the area businesses and the lack of streetscape and amenities as negatives.

“Vagrancy, dangerous traffic, decline in safety, decline in property value.”

Another challenge resulting from perception issues focused on the difficulty of establishing new uses and attracting new business investment in the area. The larger industrial and social service uses which presently exist in the project area were often referenced as negative influences on public perceptions about the area.



Plan implementation: Issues about implementation of the plan that will ultimately be created through this community process were varied. Some people focused on funding, suggesting the use of Tax Increment Financing or investors to implement the plan. Others cited the uncertainty of funding as a challenge, while others indicated

they fear a tax increase will be

“The City will listen to developers but not to citizens.”

needed to implement the plan. Another implementation challenge is the perception that the City and/or UCCS already has a plan for this area which is not being shared with the community. Issues related to trust of the City were also raised. Some expressed doubt about the City’s willingness and/or ability to follow through on implementing the plan. Finally, uncertainty for existing businesses and residents about what the plan will recommend and when changes will occur was often mentioned as a challenge.

THIRD TIER CHALLENGES

Other challenges mentioned less often were trail connectivity in the area, adequacy of City services to the area, and the presence of homeless people. Public safety issues were also raised, including pedestrian/bicyclist safety, currently allowed uses being a draw for “nefarious” activity in the area, and the presence of drug activity and prostitution.

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PROJECT AREA

FIRST TIER OPPORTUNITIES
Businesses
Transportation
Land Use
Housing
Infrastructure
SECOND TIER OPPORTUNITIES
History of the area
Trails and parks
Facilities to support UCCS
Amenities

FIRST TIER OPPORTUNITIES

Businesses: Responses to the question about opportunities in the project area most often referenced businesses. Many expressed the need and desire for new businesses, and for a good mix of businesses, with some recommending existing industrial/manufacturing businesses should remain in that mix. Others were more specific about new business opportunities, preferring small, local businesses and shops. Others see the need for a ‘big box’ store in the area, while others specifically indicated the desire *not* to have ‘big

“Create businesses that are not only good for this area, but also good for the community.”

box’ as part of the business mix. Others would like “useful stores,” like a grocery store and a gas station, and entertainment-related businesses such as theaters, bars and restaurants. Some want to expand the “University Village approach” to provide retail options to this area, while others specifically recommended *not* extending that approach, considering it not distinctive enough or too “car-centric.”

Others focused on UCCS’s presence as being a draw for new business, citing an opportunity for job training in conjunction with UCCS. Some speculated that UCCS’s Bachelor of Innovation degree will serve as a business magnet.



A number of roundtable and workshop participants specifically mentioned the planned National Cybersecurity Center as presenting an opportunity for the area. Many believe the Center will likely create jobs and encourage other businesses to locate in the area. In addition, use of rehabbed manufacturing space for arts, food, and entertainment-related businesses was suggested, as was artisan manufacturing. Some participants called for help for existing businesses, including offering incentives, “facelifts,” and “...possible use of an entitlement process to eliminate costs of business relocations.” Finally, some predicted that having new businesses in the area will transform it into a “younger place,” and that new businesses could also strengthen the nearby Fillmore Street area.

Transportation: Transportation is seen by many as both a challenge and an opportunity. In considering opportunities, some people focused on traffic flow and traffic movement, suggesting additional turn lanes and traffic signals. Others

“Create a street design that will catalyze the redevelopment we desire.”

want easier access to businesses and to UCCS for drivers,

pedestrians and bicyclists as well as use of the wide rights-of-way for bike lanes and pedestrian walkways. Many focused on transit opportunities, suggesting Nevada Avenue could become a high-density corridor, including the addition of transit service to connect the project area to downtown and the rest of the community. A few suggested a free trolley in the right-of-way to move people around the corridor or a street car with links to UCCS, Colorado College, and downtown. People also saw opportunities for improved parking in the area. Some suggested minimizing traffic on Nevada Avenue by locating parking lots behind businesses and the use of shuttles to serve them.

Land use: A very consistent theme of the many land use comments was that the area be one of mixed-use, integrating existing and new uses, and resulting in an area where one can “live/work/shop/play.” Respondents called for a mix of old and new buildings and for creativity in considering land uses. As one person suggested, “Make it a model for future land use planning.”

Housing: Housing was often cited as an opportunity. The suggestions made most often centered on housing that serves all income

“Homes and traffic patterns should be planned to make this a place people want to live.”

levels and ages. Some used the term ‘intergenerational’ in describing the housing opportunity they envision. Some also see an opportunity for high-density housing.

Infrastructure: Opportunities related to infrastructure focused on making the project area safer for drivers, pedestrian, bicyclists, shoppers, and employees. Many indicated they would like the project area to be more beautiful by adding

benches, lighting and streetscaping, or by extending the medians, trees, and underpasses south from University Village. A suggestion was also made to create a water retention facility to address stormwater and drainage issues in the area. A related suggestion was to provide non-potable water for landscaping in the area and at UCCS. A few cited the placement of utility and telephone lines underground as an opportunity.



SECOND TIER OPPORTUNITIES

History of the area: Many of the process participants indicated a knowledge of and appreciation for the history of the project area. Many responses supported the desire to preserve historic properties and a few suggested revitalizing historic properties in the Cragmoor area. Design standards and interpretive signs that reflect and explain the area’s history were also referenced as an opportunity.



Trails and parks: A number of participants were interested in trails that provide access to the area and that connect to other local and regional trails. They saw opportunities for “green connecting spaces,” and many expressed the desire to have a new park in the area.



Facilities to support UCCS: Opportunities to provide facilities and services to support the needs of UCCS were consistently raised, particularly by survey respondents. Opportunities

“Thousands of UCCS students and other university personnel [are] looking for a place to meet in the evenings or places to have social meetings after work.”

to create student housing, hotels/long-term stay facilities for parents of students,

and housing for UCCS staff were often cited. The opportunity to meet the University population’s retail needs was also suggested, such as the addition of restaurants, bars, a grocery store, and a movie theater. The possibility of leveraging UCCS’s curriculum by creating labs and research facilities within the project area was seen by some as an opportunity.

Amenities: Many participants noted the opportunity and the desire to make the project area a “destination.” Supporting that vision were suggestions for adding a variety of amenities to the area. Amenities mentioned included a community event area, a multi-generational community center, a community garden, water features, and access to and incorporation of the water to the west of the project area.



“This area is a treasure waiting to happen. The potential is vast and good.”

THIRD TIER OPPORTUNITIES

Among the additional opportunities less frequently mentioned were the area’s location advantage, with good access to Interstate 25, proximity to downtown and UCCS, its central location, and the possibility of becoming

“Location! It is prime real estate and provides great connection points to major roads as well as having access to open spaces, parks, and greenways.”

a gateway to the city. Other opportunities cited dealt with City policies and planning, including a suggestion for the creation of the “first City/Urban Renewal Authority project that is proactive, with the City actively soliciting public/private initiatives.” Others suggested offering Tax Increment Financing to attract new businesses. Some people expressed the desire for planning that will ensure that the project area is different from all

“It adds to Colorado Springs and is different from what we already have.”

other areas in the community, and that the plan will, “...benefit all without economic discrimination.” Other opportunities cited included a focus on arts and culture and health and wellness, capitalizing on related facilities located in and around the project area.

VISION ELEMENTS FOR THE PROJECT AREA

FIRST TIER VISION ELEMENTS	
	Land use and planning
	Transportation
	Business mix
SECOND TIER VISION ELEMENTS	
	Housing mix
	Infrastructure
	Trails and parks
	Clean/amenities

FIRST TIER VISION ELEMENTS

Land use and planning: In considering the most important elements for the project area’s future, many participants expressed support for a wide mix of uses in the area. Some suggested storefronts with residential uses behind them or

“[It should be] cleaned up, renewed but not generic California-esque architecture.”

first-floor retail with residential above. Others

were interested in shared uses, such as industrial and coffee shop combinations. In describing how they would like the area to look and feel, some respondents would like to have businesses close to the road with parking behind. Others called for establishing a ‘character’ for the area, with some seeking a modern feel and others calling for incorporating and capitalizing on the area’s history.

Some would like outdoor spaces to take advantage of the views in the area. Others focused on the desire to incorporate the area’s waterways. Others want the area planned for “enjoyment and relaxation,” with public spaces for events and performances. Many would like the area to feel like and be a destination, with a “downtown” feel, rather than like “just another strip mall.”

“The view. Look at that mountain. Look at the space! This is sometimes the first thing visitors see as they get off of I-25. Yuck!”



In thinking about the future of the area, others were concerned about existing residents and businesses, stressing the need to value them and to “address the fears” of those currently in the project area. Many want to keep existing businesses as well as bring in new. Some mentioned the need to increase trust in the City of Colorado Springs, expressing the hope that the City will “listen to citizens as well as developers,” and that the plan that is created through this process will indeed be implemented.

“Those with affordable housing want to know what will happen to them if their landlords sell. Will there be assistance in place for those people?”

Transportation: Access is a key issue identified for the future of the corridor. Based on the comments received, people want easy and safe access to businesses in the area, whether they are in their cars, on foot, or on bicycles. Many

“Nevada presents a dilemma, it’s the primary corridor but it’s also a barrier to non-motorized travel.”

indicated a desire to having multi-modal transportation options available to them, calling for transit, streetcars, and light rail, in addition to walking and biking. Residents in adjacent neighborhoods, however, consistently expressed the desire to have traffic and transit impacts to their neighborhoods minimized. A few suggested on-street parking in the area to reduce traffic speeds and “make people feel safe.” Others thought using frontage roads parallel to Nevada Avenue would help accommodate UCCS traffic and minimize traffic congestion in the area.



Business mix: Many would like to have a wide variety of businesses in the renewed project area. A large number of those prefer a community-based flavor, using such adjectives as “local,” “small,” “mom and pop,” “boutique,” and “historic.” Some called for no ‘big box’ stores: “The city has enough big box retailers and franchise restaurants. How about a destination arts and entertainment district?” Fewer indicated a preference for having a ‘big box’ store in the area. Many people would welcome having a grocery store, a gas station, a movie theater, and other service-related businesses that make it convenient for people to live in the area.

Housing mix: Responses consistently indicated the desire and the need for housing in the area that is affordable for all incomes and ages.

Some specifically mentioned the need to include mobile home parks as a housing option. Others called for “...apartments for rent and condominiums for sale.” The need for UCCS student off-campus housing and for housing for future employees of the National Cybersecurity Center was also cited.

“The biggest challenge for this corridor will be making improvements without pricing current residents out of the area.”

Infrastructure: Many of the infrastructure needs mentioned are related to transportation-related issues, such as streets and sidewalks on Nevada Avenue and on side streets. Some responses focused on the need for streetscapes throughout the area. A few called for “A total infrastructure plan.”

Trails/parks: Many people see trails, trail connections, and parks in their descriptions of the future for this area. Trails connections to the creek and to other area/regional trails were specifically mentioned.



Clean, with amenities: “Clean” was used repeatedly in describing the desired future of this area, as were “uncluttered” and “green.” Many suggested “tree-lined” streets. Others clearly envision an area with such amenities water features, sculpture, and fountains.

“Make it an area we Colorado Springs citizens are proud of! Make it a place where out-of-towners want to come. In short, a destination!”

USE OF RESPONSES

The wealth of information received through the roundtable, survey, and workshop responses served as the basis for a statement of the project area Vision. That Vision will guide plan decisions. Combined with the information gathered through technical analysis conducted by the NES consultant team, the Vision will drive development of a set of concepts that will provide a variety of possible approaches for a plan to renew the project area.

Participants in an October 27 community workshop will review, discuss, and provide responses to the concepts. That community guidance will be considered and applied as plan alternatives are developed for the community's review and consideration at a December 8 community workshop.