

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: MAY 12, 2003

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: EAST COLORADO BOULEVARD SPECIFIC PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL
IMPACT REPORT

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Certify the adequacy of the East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR); and
2. Approve the East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan, as shown in Attachment E; and
3. Approve the De Minimis Impact Finding on the State Fish and Wildlife Habitat; and
4. Direct the City Clerk to file a Notice of Determination with the Los Angeles County Recorder; and
5. Direct the City Attorney to prepare an implementation ordinance.

ADVISORY BODY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Specific Plan has been reviewed by the Planning Commission, Design Commission, Cultural Heritage Commission, Arts Commission, and Transportation Advisory Commission. Each of the Commissions unanimously recommended approval of the Specific Plan to the City Council along with some suggested modifications. The additional modifications forwarded by the Commissions are described below:

Design Commission (meeting of October 28, 2002)

- The Plan originally recommended the discontinuance of the planting of palm trees along Colorado Boulevard. The coordinating committee felt that the trees serve no aesthetic purpose and should be removed. However, the Design Commission and Planning Commission disagreed, stating that palm trees are consistent on Colorado Boulevard and are part of its identity. *The Plan retains the palm trees in the street tree plan for Colorado Boulevard.*
- The Design Commission felt that elements referring to or "marketing" Route 66 should be tasteful and understated. *This has been incorporated into the implementation plans.*
- The Design Commission felt that the density of 60 units/acre within the light rail "nodes" was too high and it should be reduced to 48 units/acre. *The Plan continues to recommend 60 units/acre in the light rail nodes.*

Historic Preservation Commission (meeting of November 4, 2002)

- Encourage the City to continue the existing façade improvement program along Colorado Boulevard. *This item has been listed as an option for funding within the implementation plan.*
- Extend the existing light fixture along Colorado Boulevard through the Lamanda Park sub-area rather than placing a new light fixture in this area. *The Plan recommends a unique light fixture in this area to promote its special feel.*
- Promote implementation action to research significant or potentially historic buildings along Colorado Boulevard for Historic Preservation. *This item has been incorporated into the Plan.*
- Agreed with the Design Commission in that the promotion of the Route 66 theme should be tasteful and understated and agreed with the Design Commission on the density of residential units in the light rail “nodes”.

Arts Commission (meetings of November 13, 2002 and December 11, 2002)

- Incorporate the area formerly known as “Chihuahuita” into the sub-area names or use in some fashion. The Planning Commission agreed with the Arts Commission on this point and recommended that one of the sub-areas be renamed Chihuahuita (see below).

Transportation Advisory Commission (meeting of December 6, 2002)

- Emphasized the importance of parking management around the light rail stations, especially in the neighborhoods around the Allen Avenue station. Assure that staff is closely monitoring the parking, access and egress issues around the station upon their opening. The Specific Plan process has been closely aligned with the light rail station parking meetings being sponsored by the city.

Planning Commission (meetings of February 26, 2003 and March 26, 2003)

- The recommendations of the Planning Commission focused primarily on wording changes and priorities for implementation. Based on Council action, staff anticipates adding all of the editorial changes recommended by the Commission as well as highlighting the priorities made for implementation in the final document. These changes are listed in Appendix B.
- The Planning Commission recommended certification of the Environmental Impact Report with no modifications.
- The Planning Commission recommended changing the name of the “Route 66” sub-area to the “Chihuahuita” sub-area to reflect the history of Colorado Boulevard. The Plan, however, recommends retaining the “Route 66” name because the historic area of Chihuahuita was not located in this geographic area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Based on the General Plan goals, the direction of this planning effort has been to create a straightforward, “implementable” plan that seeks to revitalize Colorado Boulevard. The vision for this three-mile stretch of Colorado Boulevard (and Allen Avenue to the light rail station) is of a series of distinct business neighborhoods where businesses and land uses are vital and vibrant and a sense of place is established. In addition, the Boulevard will be tied together and unified through a coordinated public improvement and streetscape beautification process. The

plan area is linear and narrow, extending for approximately three miles along the Boulevard and Allen Avenue while only a lot or two deep. This creates a unique set of challenges and re-enforces the importance of streetscape improvements as a key component of the planning effort.

The Plan meets the goals of the General Plan by establishing allowable land uses, providing development standards and design guidelines, and identifying a public streetscape improvement program. The Plan responds to the suggestions, ideas, and concerns of the many business and residential neighborhoods along East Colorado Boulevard and incorporates these concerns into the Plan recommendations. The recommendations of the Plan honors the history of the buildings along the Boulevard and the Boulevard itself through historic preservation and design guidelines. Perhaps most importantly, the Plan advocates mixed-use development and an increased residential presence along Colorado Boulevard to create a compact urban form, reduce vehicle trips, and add vitality to the mix of land uses along the Boulevard.

BACKGROUND:

The East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan is the seventh of the seven specific plans to be initiated by the City following the adoption of the General Plan Land Use Element in 1992. The Specific Plan area includes all parcels with frontage along Colorado Boulevard from Catalina Avenue on the west to the eastern edge of the City limits. The Plan area also includes all parcels with frontage on Allen Avenue from Colorado Boulevard to the 210 Freeway. The General Plan calls for this Specific Plan to “identify areas which are appropriate for mixed-use and housing projects and areas where commercial development should be concentrated.”

The Plan has been organized into sub-areas (see Appendix A). Each sub-area was identified through an extensive public involvement process and has been designated based on unique characteristics or proximity to major land uses or areas (e.g. Pasadena City College, the Central District, light rail stations, etc.). Although each of the sub-areas has unique characteristics that the Plan highlights, the major focus of the Plan is to unify the entirety of East Colorado Boulevard and develop a sense of place throughout.

Public Process:

Oversight for the Plan was provided by a twelve-member coordinating committee that met monthly for approximately 18 months. The coordinating committee was comprised of stakeholders with connections to Colorado Boulevard and included residents, business owners, property owners, and Commission representatives. In addition to the committee, the plan has been presented to the general public through a number of community-wide meetings and several smaller sessions. The meetings were designed as a continuum, with the early meetings focused on introduction of plan concepts and the final meeting geared toward prioritization of the Plan recommendations. The Coordinating Committee unanimously recommended approval of the Plan.

Some of the key issues that have arisen through the public process are as follows, each of these items is described in greater detail in Appendix B:

- Beautification of the streetscape through public and private improvements.
- Promotion of “active uses” along the Boulevard to enhance safety and vitality.
- Planning for multiple modes of travel through the plan area.
- The installment of bike lanes and bike routes on and/or around Colorado Boulevard. The Plan promotes all modes of travel yet does not support installation of bike lanes along

the Boulevard. The Specific Plan provides a palette of options for bike lanes and/or routes in the vicinity of Colorado Boulevard. Additionally, the City's Transportation Department is developing a public outreach process to generate alternatives to bike lanes on Colorado Boulevard.

- Retention and protection of small businesses along the Boulevard.

Development Standards/Major Changes from existing Zoning Code:

A focus of this planning effort was to avoid creating a complex set of land use regulations and development standards for each of the sub-areas. Because the planning area is, for the most part, zoned for General Commercial use, staff attempted to keep the changes to the underlying zoning to a minimum. Some of the key changes to the development standards proposed for this Specific Plan area include:

- Multi-family residential densities up to 48 units per acre, occupying locations above street level commercial use is recommended within Mid-City, College District, Gold Line and Lamanda Park. Currently, no residential is allowed.
- Multi-family residential densities up to 60 units per acre for parcels in the Plan area within ¼ mile of transit stations. This is consistent with recommended densities around light rail stations throughout the City.
- The maximum height of buildings in the Mid-City area is limited to 60 feet rather than the existing 75 feet. Maximum heights for parcels in the Plan area within ¼ mile of light rail stations will be 60 feet. The height limit boundary of 65 feet from El Nido Avenue to the eastern edge of the City limits will be reduced to 45 feet. The allowed height will remain 45 feet in other areas along Colorado Boulevard.
- As part of the Transit-Oriented Development regulations, parking reductions of 25% will be allowed for parcels in the Plan area within ¼ mile of light rail stations. This standard has been proposed as part of the city-wide zoning revisions for all the stations.
- Design Review will be required for all buildings of 5,000 square feet or more. This is a city-wide requirement along major corridors.

Design Guidelines:

The Design Guidelines within the Specific Plan (Chapter VI) are consistent with the Citywide Design Principles. The Plan attempts to set a high standard for building design while at the same time allowing for creativity. This is especially true for architecture and signage that may reflect a "Route 66" theme. Colorado Boulevard was once Route 66 and many of the buildings along the Boulevard (e.g. automobile showrooms, commercial groupings, motels) still retain both the uses and design from this time when Route 66 was a major east-west corridor. Guidelines have been developed which allow for creative design and signage to add some visual interest to the Boulevard. The Plan also recommends the use of the City's existing façade/storefront improvement program to promote creative and interesting facades, or to restore historic façades.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:

A Draft Environmental Impact Report has been prepared by Rincon Consultants (see Appendix F). The DEIR focuses on the effects that can be expected with the adoption and implementation of the Specific Plan, and it tiers off of the 1994 General Plan EIR by addressing issues raised in

the Specific Plan that were not anticipated by the 1994 revision of the General Plan. Because the Specific Plan does not recommend more development than was originally approved and authorized through the General Plan, there are very few environmental impacts expected as a result of build-out of the project. The proposed development allowed by the General Plan and analyzed in the DEIR is 750 housing units and 650,000 square feet of commercial/industrial space.

The DEIR did not find any impacts that could not be mitigated and there is no need for a statement of overriding considerations. The only impacts expected from the Specific Plan are limited to the temporary impacts of construction of new projects. The review period of the DEIR for the Specific Plan ran from October 14, 2002 through December 6, 2002 and includes oral testimony at all public hearings.

GENERAL PLAN DETERMINATION:

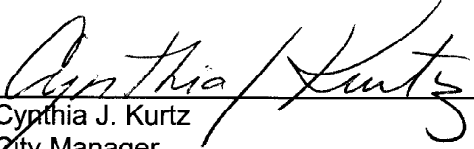
Specific Plans provide a means to address the seven guiding principles of the General Plan, as well as the direct goals for each targeted area as identified in the General Plan. The General Plan states that Specific Plans “will contain detailed development standards, distribution of land uses, infrastructure requirements, and implementation measures for the development of a specific geographic area. Transit-oriented development, pedestrian-oriented development, and mixed use development with housing over commercial, will be included in Specific Plans”. Policy 1.2 of the Land Use Element is the policy statement that authorizes the use of Specific Plans as a principal implementation tool for targeted development areas.

For the East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan area, the General Plan states that the “Overall purpose of the Specific Plan is to break up long stretches of strip commercial with residential uses and cluster commercial uses in nodes which will be identified by the Specific Plan”. Additional goals for this Plan area include the evaluation of the area surrounding the light rail station at Allen Avenue and the protection of residential areas from the impacts of light rail and the overall plan recommendations. The Specific Plan responds to these goals and meets the purposes of the General Plan by authorizing land uses, providing development standards, and recommending extensive public improvements.

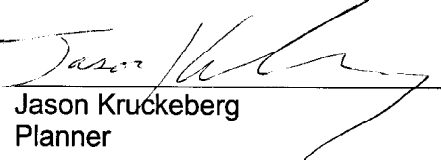
FISCAL IMPACT:

The East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan estimates approximately \$8.43 million in improvements for the specific plan area. These numbers were generated through the specific plan process and were reviewed by the Public Works Department. The items are listed in the Implementation chapter of the Specific Plan (Chapter VIII) and are estimated to be funded over at least a 10-year time horizon. Once priorities have been set for the projects within the Implementation Plan, there are many funding sources that will be sought to finance the improvements. Some of the possibilities include federal and state grants and business improvement districts. Also, new developments within the planning area would be responsible to fund adjacent streetscape improvements. In addition, many of the action items identified in the Implementation Plan would be a part of the Capital Improvement Plan and the Planning and Development Department, Public Works, or Transportation Departments’ work programs.


Respectfully submitted,


Cynthia J. Kurtz
City Manager

Prepared by:


Jason Kruckeberg
Planner

Approved by:


Richard J. Bruckner
Director of Planning and Development

- Attachment A: Map of Plan area
- Attachment B: Additional background and detail from Specific Plan process
- Attachment C: Public requests for re-zoning as part of the Specific Plan
- Attachment D: Comments received from the public at community meetings
- Attachment E: East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan (already distributed)
- Attachment F: East Colorado Boulevard Specific Plan Environmental Impact Report (already distributed)