

# ILLUSTRATING VISION: THE EAST MULBERRY PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Metta Urban Design (MUD) requires a study for its client, the City of Fort Collins, Colorado to assist in visioning character areas for the East Mulberry Plan. The East Mulberry Plan (“the Plan”) will replace the 2003 East Mulberry Corridor Plan and will determine priorities, direct growth, and guide future improvements for the East Mulberry area, a 3,000 acre area in northeast Fort Collins that serves as an important industrial center and as a busy gateway between I-25 and Fort Collins. The area is expected to see significant growth in the coming years as large areas of land are developed for residential and mixed-use uses.

## OBJECTIVES

This capstone project focuses on developing a vision for three of the six character areas in the Mulberry Corridor: Airpark, Future Development, and Mulberry Frontage. Using community feedback, the guidance of other plans, and the best practices for placemaking in light-industrial areas and transportation corridors, this capstone provides a series of recommendations that emphasizes urban design, preserving affordability, and encouraging economic development.

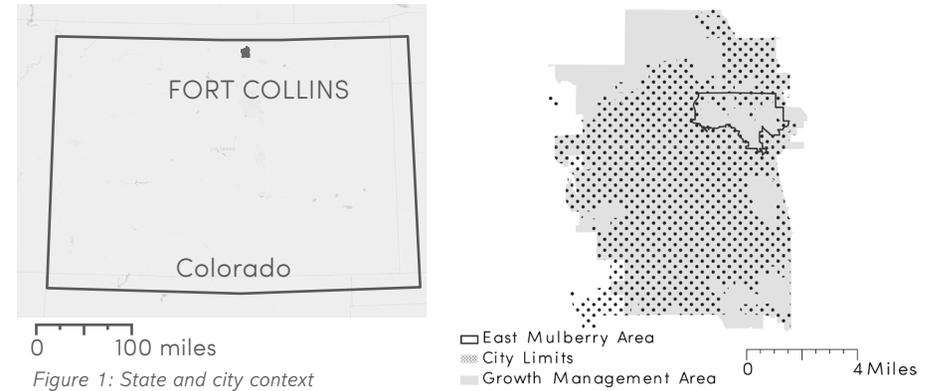
## PROJECT PROGRESS SO FAR

The City began the planning process for the East Mulberry Plan in 2021. Throughout 2021, the staff compiled existing conditions and conducted a series of community meetings with the business community and residents. Towards the end of 2021, Metta Urban Design was contracted to assist the team in creating a vision for the area through graphic support and document production.

Several constraints exist that must be considered when creating a vision for the character areas – most notably East Mulberry’s position as an important gateway into the city, floodplain and safety concerns, a need to preserve existing industrial uses, encouraging growth while maintaining affordability, and the opportunity to annex unincorporated land into the city.

## PRIOR COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community engagement in the summer of 2021 included a series of meetings with residents and business owners to determine concerns and goals. Key concerns expressed by participants included gentrification, increased/invasive regulation, loss of diversity (in demographics and in uses), traffic flow/business access, crime/homelessness, flooding/drainage, and aesthetics. It seems both commercial and residential respondents want to improve aesthetics of the corridor but the businesses worry about increased difficulty in adhering to any new or additional regulations. Connectivity and flow for cars, pedestrians, bicycles, and trucks or trailers was shared across both categories of respondents.



## EAST MULBERRY PLAN GOALS AND BIG IDEAS

The Plan has six primary goals:

1. Dedicated Space for Industry
2. Safe and Functional Stormwater & Transportation Infrastructure
3. Integrate and Connect to Community Amenities & Services
4. Protect and Promote Historic and Natural Features
5. Improve Placemaking of East Mulberry Commercial Frontage
6. Explore Phased Annexation of Enclave

“Big Ideas” were proposed for each goal, serving as strategies to pursue. Several of the proposed Big Ideas are of particular interest to this project:

- Foster innovation and entrepreneurship for commercial and industrial uses
- Customized approach to in-fill development and business improvements
- Increase multi-modal transportation connections
- Improve stormwater Infrastructure
- Explore mechanisms to maintain housing affordability and existing character of residential neighborhoods
- Increase multi-modal transportation connections
- Protect existing natural habitats and features (including the Poudre River, Dry Creek, Cooper Slough, and Boxelder Creek) through thoughtful and appropriate development and buffer standards
- Identify new areas for parks and natural areas
- Increase access to existing parks and natural areas
- Increase urban tree canopy
- Collaborate with CDOT, adjacent business-owners and other community stakeholders on the re-design of East Mulberry for multimodal transportation.

# METHODOLOGY

The **background research** included several elements: reviewing summaries, reports, and presentations of research and work already completed by Fort Collins staff for the purpose of creating the new East Mulberry Area Plan; reviewing existing plans for relevant information or recommendations to the East Mulberry Corridor area; reviewing studies and literature about indicators for and preventative strategies against involuntary displacement; and compiling case studies of strategies, tools, or designs that may benefit the study area.

The **analysis** was initiated by identifying design patterns and characteristics through continued site visits, capturing images of existing buildings and streetscape on Google Maps, Streetview, and Google Earth, and identifying key characteristics for each character area and activity center. Then, mapping was used to examine existing conditions including geographic features, infrastructure, use patterns, relationships with surrounding built environment, and constraints and opportunities for the East Mulberry Plan process. Plan guidance from the background research was broken down by character area to identify area-specific guidance and illustrated in a series of maps.

Recommendations for Policies, Programs, and Projects that can help reach the plan's goals were summarized in a table and illustrated in a single Character Area Recommendations Map. Then recommendations specific to each character area were discussed in more detail and accompanied by conceptual renders of project outcomes.

- a study of gentrification by the City and County of Denver that studied early indicators of incoming gentrification and described tools and strategies to prevent it, providing insight on East Mulberry's risk and proactive ways the East Mulberry Plan can combat it;
- multi-way boulevards, with dedicated and separated spaces for bicycles, pedestrians, and vehicles, were examined for their potential application along East Mulberry Street;
- a collaborative business model in North Kansas City, MO that utilizes shipping containers in a formerly vacant lot for small businesses and start ups, providing an example of a use that honors the industrial character of the area while fostering innovation and supporting local workers;
- green infrastructure guidelines that could help address flooding, increasing the urban tree canopy, and aesthetics.

# BACKGROUND RESEARCH

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

A review of demographic information revealed that the population of East Mulberry is more diverse than the city of Fort Collins as a whole. Two-thirds of East Mulberry households are families, and the percentage of single family households is twice as high as Fort Collins. The percentage living under the poverty line is about the same, as are the same number in poverty who are currently struggling.

East Mulberry has a slightly higher percentage of single family homes. Its second highest unit type? Mobile Homes. Affordability has been a concern for residents, and for good reason - homes cost \$100,00 less than in Fort Collins, and renters are already paying significantly more of their income towards rent.

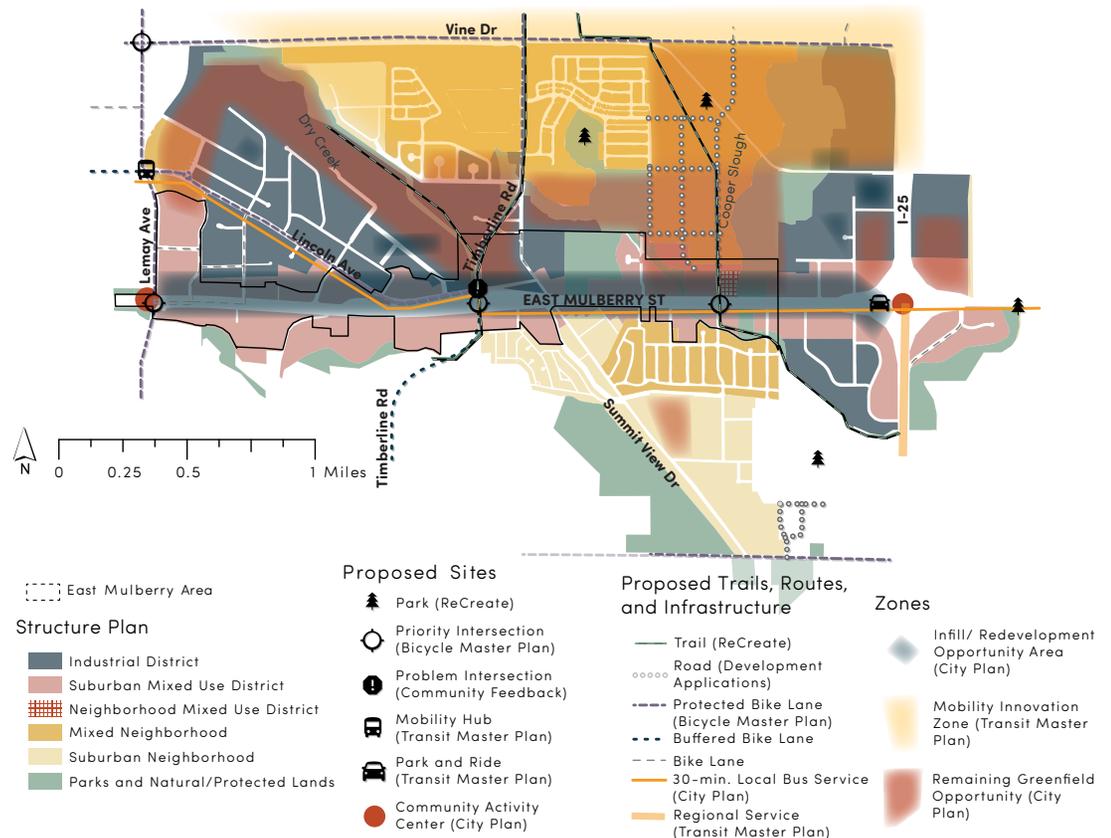
## EXISTING PLAN GUIDANCE AND PRECEDENTS

The Existing Plan Guidance Map compiled relevant guidance from the original East Mulberry Corridor Plan (2003), City Plan (2019), Transportation Master Plan (2019), Transit Master Plan (2019), Bicycle Master Plan (2014), the Pedestrian Master Plan (2011), and ReCreate, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2021). The resulting guidance was compiled in the Existing Plan Guidance Map (see Figure 2) and paints a spatial picture of how the East Mulberry area could look in the coming years. Unsurprisingly, most of the guidance focuses on the north half of the area where large amounts of developable land and many infill opportunities exist.

Precedents and case studies were reviewed, including:

EXISTING PLAN GUIDANCE

Figure 2: Compilation of Existing Plan Guidance



# ANALYSIS

## EAST MULBERRY AREA CHARACTERISTICS

The East Mulberry area is 4.5 square miles; East Mulberry Street is 3 miles long and bisects the area. Land uses are primarily industrial, commercial, and residential, and landscaping tends to be minimal except in newer developments.

The southwest side of the area is bordered by natural areas and trails, as well as the Cache la Poudre River. Dry Creek and Cooper Slough are two creeks that tend to flood frequently. Much of the area is in a floodway. The six character areas of East Mulberry were identified through existing patterns of use and separation. There are six in total: Mulberry Frontage, Airpark, Future Development, I-25 Gateway, Residential, and Natural Areas. The I-25 Gateway, Residential, and Natural Areas were not studied for this capstone, but were briefly summarized.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AREA CHARACTERISTICS

This area is characterized by the site of the former Fort Collins Downtown Airport and its remaining landing strip, as well as several large open spaces available for development, most notably the 120 acre Dry Creek open space. Primary land uses include light industrial and open space, and are supported by public and institutional uses. Existing development is centered along Timberline Road and is mostly comprised of irregular blocks, varying lot sizes, deep setbacks, and blocky 1-2 story buildings covered with a few simple materials such as masonry, concrete, or corrugated metal. This style, with variation, is also typical of Airpark and Mulberry Frontage. The former municipal airport was located at the border of the Future Development and Airpark areas.

## AIRPARK AREA CHARACTERISTICS

The Airpark character area is home to one of the highest concentrations of industrial uses in the region. Land uses are primarily industrial and are supported by commercial retail and services. One of three East Mulberry area mobile home parks is located here. The blocks are irregular and oriented to Lincoln and the former airport. Setbacks are large and building entrances tend to face away from the street. Dry Creek and drainage ditches along Lincoln are often unable to handle intense stormwater volumes, resulting in flooding.

## MULBERRY FRONTAGE AREA CHARACTERISTICS

Primarily a thru-way to Fort Collins and a commercial corridor, businesses along East Mulberry are typically accessed via local streets and frontage roads. Primary uses include commercial and industrial, supported by residential uses and unofficial vehicle and equipment storage. The Cache la Poudre River and Trail passes along the southwest into Natural areas used for recreation and conservation.

## ACTIVITY CENTER CHARACTERISTICS

Three Activity Centers, identified by staff as important intersections, are located along Mulberry at Lemay, Timberline, and Greenfield Court. Lemay offers the most pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly accommodations, highlighted by the heavy use of the Poudre Trail that crosses beneath the intersection. Timberline, which includes

a second nearby intersection at Lincoln, sees heavy pedestrian and bicycle use but is not currently sufficient for safety and flow. Greenfield Court was proactively designated as an activity center (current use is much lower than the others) but incoming development applications indicate a need for redesign to accommodate significantly higher use.

## CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES MAPPING

The Constraints and Opportunities Map highlights constraints including areas of flooding, intersections with significant areas of conflict, and annexation limitations, as well as opportunities such as locations for greenspace and parks, vacant parcels and right-of-way prime for development, and geographic opportunities to improve intersections.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are visualized in the Character Area Recommendations Map (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Character Area Recommendations Map

## CHARACTER AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

