NORTH NEVADA /
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, COLORADO SPRINGS
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ZONE
TASK FORCE
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background:

Colorado Springs Mayor Steve Bach identified three Economic Opportunity Zones (EOZs) within the city limits: Downtown; South Academy; and the North Nevada/University of Colorado, Colorado Springs (UCCS) corridor. In his 2014 budget, Mayor Bach set the following goals for these EOZs as part of his strategic plan:

> *"1.2 Focus on Economic Opportunity Zones (EOZ) (Downtown, North Nevada/UCCS Corridor, South Academy)*
>
> A. Establish a stakeholder task force to conduct SWOT analyses to determine impediments to redevelopment in Economic Opportunity Zones and develop strategies for mitigating these impediments.
> B. With the stakeholder task force, craft a vision and redevelopment strategy for each EOZ and define specific outcomes
> C. Identify anchor projects that stimulate infill development and realize the vision in each EOZ
> D. Actively market and promote redevelopment of EOZ areas by reaching out to developer and broker communities
> E. Consider public and public-private funding options for implementing recommendations of the redevelopment strategy"
> (2014 Budget, page xxi)

The North Nevada/UCCS Task Force was co-chaired by District 1 City Councilmember Don Knight and Mr. Rob Oldach, Vice President of Colorado Structures, Incorporated. Other members of the Task Force are:

Bill Cherrier	Colorado Springs Utilities
Stephannie Finley	UCCS
Jeff Greene	El Paso County
Dave Munger	CONO
Elena Nunez	Colorado Springs Utilities
Wynne Palermo	Urban Renewal Authority
Jim Rees	Urban Renewal Authority
Nolan Schriner	Planning Consultant
Parry Thomas	Planner, Thomas & Thomas
Fred Veitch	Nor'wood
Martin Wood	UCCS

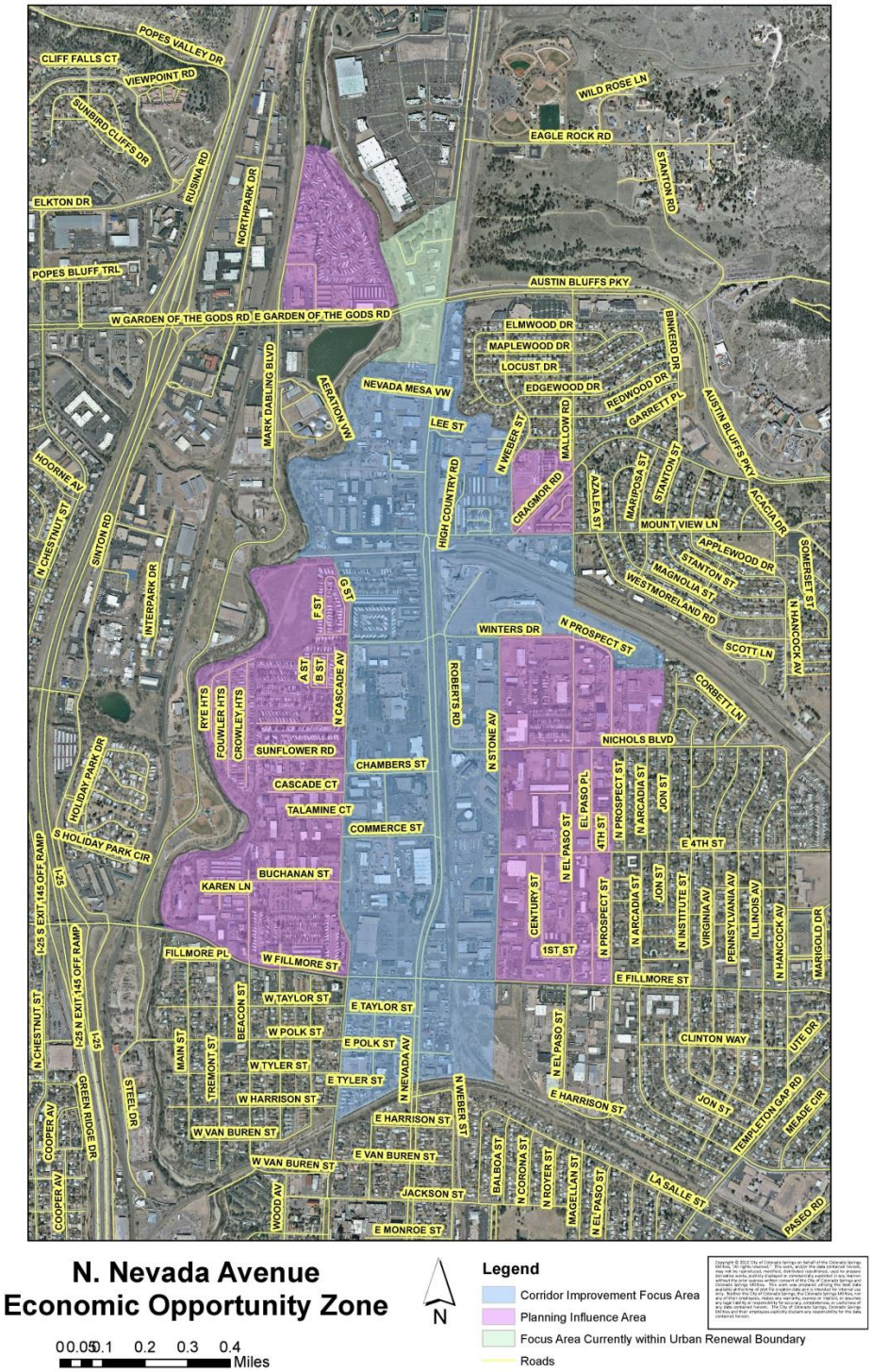
The North Nevada/UCCS Task Force was greatly assisted by the following City staff who worked directly with our group: Bob Cope, Kathleen Krager, Carl Schueler and Peter

Wysocki. Others on City staff behind the scenes also earned recognition for their assistance.

One of the Task Force's first actions was to identify and bound our area of concern to focus energy and resources on that portion of this EOZ that has the most inertia and opportunity for transformation into a community gateway and connection between UCCS and Downtown. This recommended area of focus is the immediate Nevada Avenue corridor between UCCS and the Old North End, starting at Interstate 25 (I-25) and proceeding south to Rock Island Right of Way just south of Fillmore (**Figure 1**).

Within this area, the North Nevada/UCCS Task Force is pleased to present their findings and recommendations.

Figure 1
Recommended EOZ Focus Area



N. Nevada Avenue
Economic Opportunity Zone

0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 Miles

N

Legend

- Corridor Improvement Focus Area
- Planning Influence Area
- Focus Area Currently within Urban Renewal Boundary
- Roads

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FINDINGS:

1. **Establish a stakeholder task force to conduct SWOT analyses to determine impediments to redevelopment in Economic Opportunity Zones and develop strategies for mitigating these impediments**

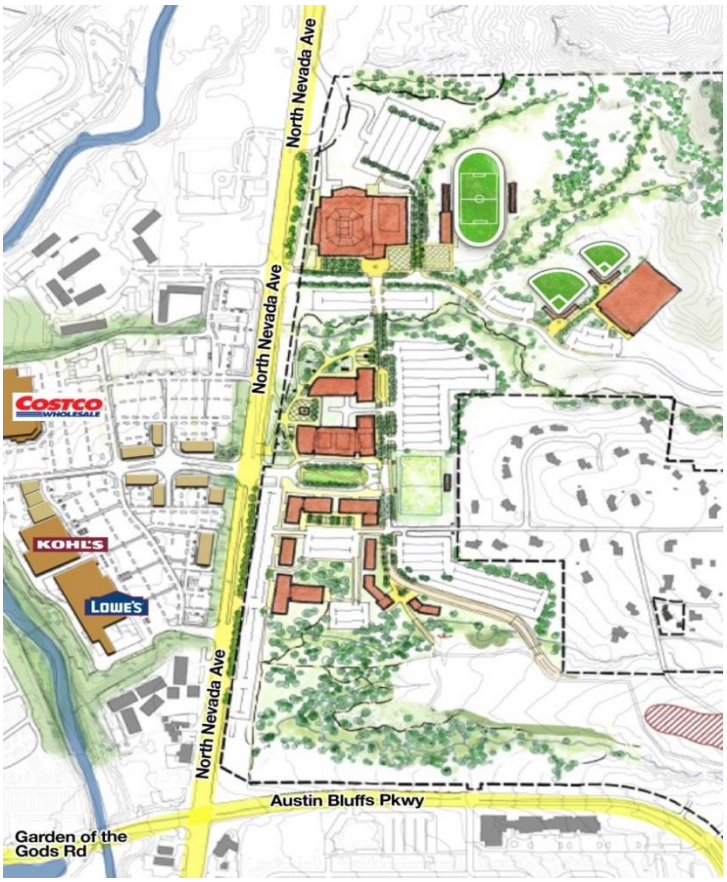
   - Strengths:

     i. The major strength within this area is the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs' already planned expansion along their property on the east side of Nevada from Austin Bluffs/Garden of the Gods intersection north to almost I-25. When completed, this expansion will include concentrated studies in sports and wounded warrior medicine as well as the performing arts.

     ii. The second strength is the City's existing redevelopment of University Village Colorado.

     iii. The third strength is that both the UCCS and UVC initiatives have already lead to major utility infrastructure improvements which should reduce both the need and cost of additional utility improvements for the southern half of the zone from the Austin Bluffs/Garden of the Gods intersection to the Rock Island ROW.

Figure 2- Excerpt from UCCS Master Plan



- Weaknesses:

  i. The major weakness is the disarray into which the corridor from the Austin Bluffs/Garden of the Gods intersection to the Rock Island ROW, has fallen. While several good small- businesses are located along the corridor, many others have deteriorated.

  ii. ComCor maintains the majority of its facilities in this corridor, housing on the order of 400 - 450 daily residents, with about 200 others checking in but not staying overnight in nine facilities.

  iii. Crime rates within this EOZ appear to be high based on CSPD statistics, and the perception of crime is also an issue.

  iv. Another major issue is the now-closed dog track.

  v. The wide and unimproved existing street roadway and streetscape are visually unappealing and create a sense of separation from, and lack of connectivity with adjoining uses and properties.

  vi. The railroad ROW along the east side of Nevada is a weakness. While unused, this area, if left unmitigated, will cause any redevelopment to be significantly offset from Nevada and is inconsistent with urban redevelopment best practices.

  vii. At this time, there is very little prioritization of funding for public improvements allocated for this area.

  viii. An additional weakness is CSU's Birdsall power plant occupying a major footprint within this area.

Photo 1 - Existing Conditions

Wide non-landscaped railroad right-of-way and CSU easements on east side of corridor

- <u>Opportunities:</u>

  UCCS's expansion provides Colorado Springs with the perfect opportunity, catalyst and leverage to redevelopment the North Nevada/UCCS EOZ in following areas:

  i. Economic growth in the northern portion of the corridor centered around UCCS needs to include but not limited to:
     a). Off-campus student housing
     b). Other standard neighborhood services for UCCS's growing student population: grocery stores, restaurants, entertainment, etc.
     c). Hotels for parents, new students, and medical tourism
     ii. Economic growth in the southern portion providing high income jobs directly connected to the areas of study and work force being produced by:
     a). UCCS - 2.1 miles from Four Diamonds to Fillmore and Nevada
     b). Colorado College (CC) - 2.1 miles to Fillmore and Nevada
     c). Colorado Technical University (CTU) - 2.1 miles to Fillmore and Nevada

  iii. Connecting UCCS to both Colorado College and Downtown with both multi-modal transportation and architecture.

  iv. Finally, there are some historic or unique buildings within the corridor which could be adaptively redeveloped to establish the corridor as an inviting and special place.

- Threats:

    i. As other cities also emerge from harsh economic times, they will be actively seeking to promote redevelopment of their neighborhoods. Those cities with college campuses will be in direct competition with Colorado Springs for the same high paying jobs we are seeking.

    ii. Uncertainties surrounding topics such as the street cross section (including its design, access, timing and funding), decisions regarding rights-of-way and easements, a possible but undetermined land use plan and Code changes, and yet-to-be-made choices concerning acceptable special incentives for this area, may all combine to put a damper on non-City reinvestment activities.

    iii. Third, any new entrants into the EOZ before new codes are developed, could be non-conforming to the new master plan for this area.

    iv. Finally, the current land-use regulations for this area are arguably too permissive in some respects and not permissive enough in others. Additionally these regulations largely govern land and building use rather than the sometimes more important aspects of urban form and design.

2. **<u>With the stakeholder task force, craft a vision and redevelopment strategy for each EOZ and define specific outcome</u>**

- As stated above under opportunities, the Task Force Vision for the North Nevada/UCCS EOZ is threefold:
    i. Economic growth in the northern portion of the EOZ based upon UCCS student/visitor population needs
    ii. Economic growth in the southern portion centered around high-paying, career-orientated jobs supporting all three college institutions adjacent to the EOZ (UCCS, CC and CTU)
    iii. Redefining and connecting North Nevada Avenue with CC and the downtown area with multi-modal transportation options

- To best achieve the above Vision, the Task Force crafted the following redevelopment strategy centered on maximizing the City's above strengths and mitigating the weaknesses and threats to take full advantage of the unique opportunities available for this EOZ.

    i. The first step in the Task Force's redevelopment strategy to achieve the above Vision is that City and UCCS should jointly combine resources to retain an expert third party consultant with experience in the "town-gown" development/redevelopment field including extensive experience in community planning, land planning, and architecture for similar projects. The end result should be an over-arching Master Plan containing the following:
    a). A Vision Plan
    b). A Market Study and Demand Analysis of desirable uses
    c). Specific recommendations for incorporating design elements, the ROW improvements, and streetscape.

    Additionally, the consultant should seek public input before finalizing any design; potential using the City's Camp Creek community involvement process as a model.

    ii. At the same time the consultant is developing the Master Plan:

    a). The City should work with ComCor to identify ComCor's long term goals and requirements with respect to the planned improvements in the EOZ.

    b). CSU should review the future need for the Birdsall power plant and alternatives to the plant in its 2014 Electric Integrated Resource Plan.

    c). City Council should develop an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the railroad to acquire and/or remove their ROW easement along the east side of Nevada.

    d). The City's Historic Preservation Board and Planning Department should jointly identify any historical or unique buildings deserving of preservation.

e). The Colorado Springs Regional Business Alliance should work with the UCCS, CC, and CTU to develop capture plans to identify and attract businesses with high-paying, career-fulfilling jobs to the EOZ.

f). The City's Public Works and Planning Department's should coordinate with property owners and stakeholders to prepare an updated transportation corridor and streetscape plan for Nevada Avenue to connect UCCS with CC and Downtown with multi-modal transportation options.

g). City Council and City Planning should develop "interim" land use codes for the EOZ for any new land uses and activities before redevelopment in accordance with the above master plan could begin. While these new uses may be allowable under existing zoning codes and economically beneficial to the City, they could also be inconsistent with the new vision and requirements for the EOZ.

- The Task Force believes that at the completion of the above steps, the City should have at least the following specific outcomes:

i. **A specific vision of both desirable and undesirable uses and design features**. Examples include, but are not limited to:

a). **Desirable uses** (examples)

1). Hotels and motels supportive of UCCS and related uses (parents, medical tourism, business, convention travelers, and associated visitors)
2). Student housing of various types including married student housing
3). Multifamily housing of various types, densities, and price points - may include senior housing if well integrated with other uses - owner occupied and rental
4). Grocery store to meet the needs of existing neighborhoods and expected new housing
5). Office parks with businesses connected to the surrounding universities/colleges
6). Student-related retail and service uses, including late night activities, in close proximity to campus and unique and one-of-a-kind uses.
7). Entertainment and restaurants
8). Health care and wellness including but not limited to uses associated with UCCS.
9). Vertical or horizontal mixed use projects
10). Uses with "drive-through" orientations (e.g. banks, fast food, pharmacies etc.) are assumed acceptable for most of the corridor subject to the design considerations below

b). **Undesirable uses** (examples)

1). Most vehicle sales and storage especially if these uses require large high visibility parking lots and very high levels of lighting etc.
2). Uses with heavier industrial type or scale impacts e.g. large low-employment distribution centers and warehouses, high impact construction businesses and contractor's yards, truck terminals, batch plants and transfer stations

3). Other uses with substantial outside storage including modular home sales, and storage of construction materials - especially if in immediate proximity to the corridor)
4). Mini-storage and related uses unless located largely out of sight from the main corridor, away from activity nodes and designed in such a way that connectivity throughout the corridor is not compromised
5). Low density and/or gated housing particularly if located close to the corridor or activity nodes
6). Concentrations of human services establishments, detention facilities or halfway houses
7). Concentrations of lower income housing

c). **Desirable design features** (examples)
1). Street orientation with most parking alongside or beside structures
2). Enhanced landscaping and streetscaping
3). Building design enhancements potentially including architectural context sensitivity, facade variations, variation in rooflines, fenestration and enhanced exterior treatments such as stone, brick or high quality stucco.
4). Vehicular and pedestrian interconnectivity including options for shared or interconnected parking. Focus should include connectivity from the UCCS facilities to the adjoining uses for both vehicles and pedestrians.
5). Context sensitive lighting treatments with downcast lighting and moderate to limited intensity
6). Preference for integrated building arrangements versus poorly integrated individual pad sites or standard strip retail centers

d). **Undesirable design features** (examples)
1). Large amounts of parking between structures and the street especially poorly landscaped and buffered
2). "Over parking" of projects – especially retail centers, although consideration shall be given to use and demand (example = restaurants)
3). Buildings without architectural variability
4). Lower quality exterior finishes such as basic cinderblock, plain pre-cast concrete or large areas of metal roofing
5). Poorly maintained, "highway scale", and/or uncoordinated signage

ii. **A New Cross Section and Theme for North Nevada Avenue**

a). The current approved transportation plans for the Nevada between Garden of the Gods and Fillmore call for a six-lane cross section with limited designated full movement access points. This 2009 plan allowed for 'worst case' projections for growth in future traffic counts on this segment of Nevada, along with its role as a higher speed arterial corridor. Even though this six-lane plan was adopted only five years ago, the Task Force strongly believes a more limited four-lane cross section is more appropriate.

b). Although it would continue to serve as a major arterial, the purpose of this roadway should be as a full service multi-modal street serving properties adjacent to it and in the surrounding areas, with less emphasis on high speed, long distance though traffic. This cross section would complement and

transition between the somewhat higher speed segment north of Garden of the Gods Road and anticipated plans for managing the mature tree-lined segment in the Old North End to the south. The specifics of the recommended cross section will need to be determined based on a sound engineering and modeling process that includes stakeholder input. However, anticipated elements for segments other than at major intersections could include:

1). A maximum 105-foot wide total cross section to include two through travel lanes and bicycle lanes in each direction, and either a relatively continuous center turning lane or a limited median with left turn bays.

2). Accommodation for additional full movement signalized and other intersections at planned and safe locations in a manner that allows for efficient timing queuing of signals and traffic flow to provide more frequent signalization timed for steady traffic flow at moderate speeds.

3). As safety warrants, left turn movements should be signalized with 'green ball' single lane turns in lieu of double left turn lanes and left turn arrows.

4). Potential for a significantly different streetscape treatment on west side versus the east side due to the presence of railroad right-of-way, major utility easements, utility lines, and more industrial-type uses on this side of the roadway.

5). Preservation of sufficient right-of-way to accommodate future addition of traffic lanes if needed and/or dedicated transit and bikeway corridors.

6). Accommodation of pedestrian, bicycle and transit uses and movements.

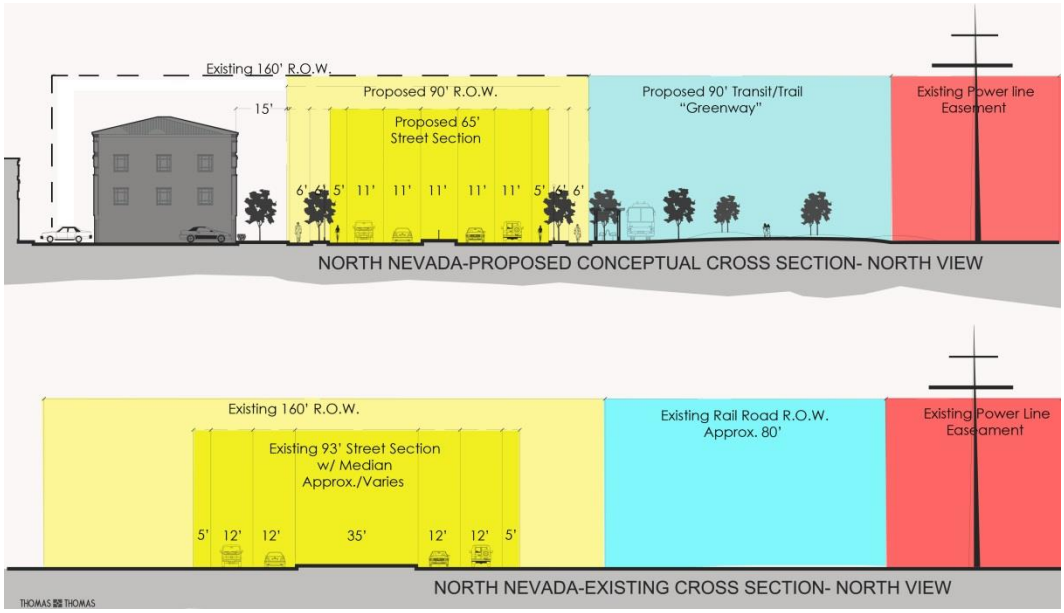
7). Inclusion of distinctive design elements to distinguish the University District such as signage, banners, median design, lighting (LED) and District monumentation.

8). Although the details of this narrower cross section would need to be worked out as part of a detailed and stakeholder-based future design process.

Figure 3 is included to provide a sense for what the new desired cross section could look like when compared with existing conditions.

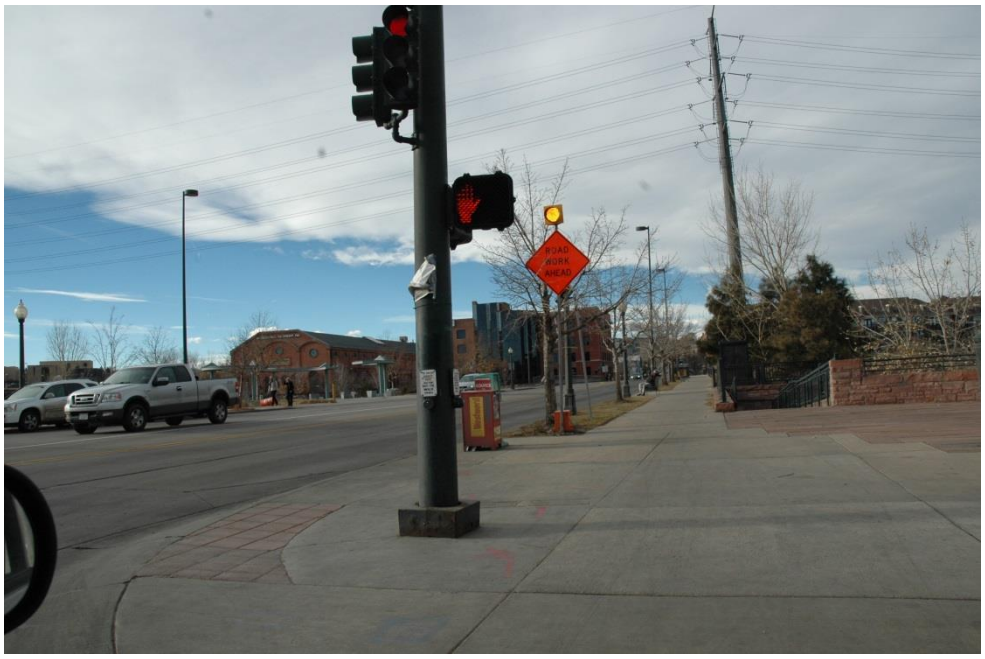
Photos 2 and 3 provide working examples from the Denver metropolitan area that can be drawn on for elements of the recommended cross section. A particularly compelling option considered by the Task Force would be a five-lane paved section punctuated with a limited number of small median features which would provide some median character and relief particularly at key intersections. Otherwise, most of the extent and value of streetscape and landscape treatments would be shifted to the edges of the roadway (beginning especially on the west side) in order to more directly enhance the value to adjoining properties and non-motorized users as well as motor vehicles.

Figure 3
Conceptual Future and Existing Cross Sections



Note: Median for proposed cross section may need to be widened at intersections to accommodate turn lanes

Photo 2- Example of a More Urban Streetscape



Example from 15th Street in Denver area showing a more urban street section

c). The look, feel and allowable access would therefore be significantly more urban, especially on the west side. More full movement accesses could be allowed with proper design and timing. A revised/reduced plan for the cross section would mesh with recommendations that will likely be brought forward next year for the Old North End arterial corridors further south. At least for the near term, sufficient right-of-way could be maintained on the east side to allow for six lanes of capacity, if ever needed. If not, this width would also be available for multi-modal options including robust transit or off street non-motorized facilities.

d). While volumetric capacity and speed should not be entirely compromised since the businesses and other uses along the corridor will depend on higher volumes and relatively efficient flow, the recommendations contained here, if executed properly, should continue to support relatively high traffic volumes.

e). Bicycle routing is also an important element. Significant demand could occur, especially in proximity to UCCS and CC. Major arterials such as this one are not that conducive to handling bicycle traffic. However, parallel street options may be limited.

f). Additionally, public transportation is essential for redevelopment. Nevada Avenue has been identified as a priority corridor for more frequent fixed route bus service (15 minute versus the current 30-minute headways) along with the other legs of an "H System" which is proposed to include Platte Avenue and Academy Boulevard). Although it may take some time to generate higher ridership along this segment of Nevada, it is expected that transit supportive conditions should continue to improve as the UCCS West Campus builds out and other complimentary uses are developed along

the corridor. For the near term, The Task Force supports phased-in implementation of more frequent "H-System" fixed route bus service.

g). Longer term options for more robust transit (potentially including streetcar) should be preserved, primarily by maintaining adequate right-of-way on the east side of the corridor, and incorporating these options as future contingency alternatives in the nearer term roadway and streetscape planning and implementation. The Task Force notes that the Phase I Streetcar Feasibility Study identifies this corridor as a potential second phase for a system that would begin closer to Downtown.

Photo 3- Santa Fe Avenue in Littleton

Example from Santa Fe Avenue in Littleton showing monumentation and landscape treatments potentially applicable to the wider east side right-of-way and easement areas

3. **<u>Identify anchor projects that stimulate infill development and realize the vision in each EOZ.</u>**

The Task Force believes that market-driven redevelopment of the North Nevada/UCCS Economic Opportunity Zone corridor will be fueled by the UCCS expansion and by the City's existing redevelopment of the west side of the same stretch of Nevada with the University Village Colorado (UVC) via the North Nevada Avenue Corridor Urban Renewal Area (NNCURA). This holistic impact will generate a 'gravity' that should naturally attract capital to this corridor for redevelopment. Even with the strength of this attraction, its longevity and the potential results should not be considered a foregone conclusion. However, in other communities this type of gravity has resulted in transformational impacts on a large scale, when there is a clear agreed upon vision that is vigorously supported by the community.

Photo 4- Closed Greyhound Track as a Redevelopment Opportunity

Closed Greyhound Track as a mixed use redevelopment opportunity

4. <u>Consider public and public-private funding options for implementing recommendations of the redevelopment strategy</u>

Until the Master Plan is complete, it is not possible to confidently estimate either the total costs of the desired public improvements or the total value of the expected redevelopment. Therefore, it is premature to fully commit to a package of funding options best suited for this EOZ, or particular areas and projects within it. In the meantime though, the Executive Branch and City Council should jointly develop and

evaluate a toolbox of incentives to help counter other competing cities pursuits as well as accelerating redevelopment within the EOZ.

5. Actively market and promote redevelopment of EOZ areas by reaching out to developer and broker communities.

Once the above consultant's Master Plan and other above steps in the preceding recommendations have been completed, the Task Force recommends the City conduct the following to actively market redevelopment of the EOZ:

- The City should implement policies and procedures to ensure that private redevelopments within the EOZ meet the following:

    i. Done Right: New uses are located in the highest-best locations in the corridor and that their developments have lasting value to further attract capital for other complementary and synergistic redevelopment projects.

    ii. Done Quickly: Prioritize existing regional, City and CSU capital improvements funds for projects benefitting this corridor.

    iii. Done Easily: Craft policies and processes to attract new capital by providing consistent answers to development questions: e.g. what the City will or will not support or bring to the table are known by developers willing to invest within the EOZ.

- City Council and City Planning should develop EOZ regulations that influence "desirable uses" more than just exterior appearance, but also the location, features, size, density and impact of any redevelopment.

Options include, but are not limited to:

- Total private funding
- Non-financial incentives (e.g. new zoning rules; streamlined permit process, overlay zones, etc.)
- Federal grants and funding options
- State grants and funding options
- County grants and funding options (e.g. PPACG)

i. City-funded infrastructure improvements (e.g. roads and utilities)
ii. Waiving or reducing City fees
iii. Special Improvement Districts
iv. Expanding the North Nevada Urban Renewal Area
v. Public-private profit sharing opportunities (e.g. tax rebates, tax incremental funding)

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The North Nevada/UCCS Task Force concluded the following:

- The above listed strengths far outweigh the weaknesses
- The City can mitigate the weaknesses and threats
- The City needs a framework in place to ensure any redevelopment including the location, size, character, connectivity, density, and amenities match up with a consistent Vision Plan for the corridor.

Therefore, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. The Mayor should appoint a Project Manager, and as necessary allocate funds within the current budget, to advance the goals of the EOZ, execute the recommendations contained herein, and follow up with other stakeholders to direct processes to ensure conformance with the Task Force Recommendations. Desired completion date is June 30, 2014.

2. The City and UCCS should jointly retain an expert third party consultant to develop a Master Plan. Desired completion date is December 15th, 2014.

3. The City should work with ComCor to identify their long term goals and requirements with respect to the planned improvements in the EOZ. Desired completion date is June 30, 2014.

4. CSU should review the future need for the Birdsall power plant and alternatives to the plant in its 2014 Electric Integrated Resource Plan. Desired completion date is December 17, 2014.

Photo 5- Birdsall Power Plant

5. The City should evaluate options to acquire and/or remove the railroad ROW easement along the east side of Nevada and then proceed with a plan for implementation. Desired completion date is December 15, 2014.

6. The City's Historic Preservation Board, City Planning and CONO should jointly identify any historical buildings deserving of preservation. Desired completion date is September 30, 2014.

7. The City should implement policies and procedures for redevelopments within the EOZ: Desired completion date is June 30, 2015.

8. The Colorado Springs Regional Business Alliance should work with the UCCS, CC, and CTU to develop capture plans to identify and attract businesses with high-paying, career-fulfilling jobs to the EOZ. Desired completed date is June 30, 2014.

9. The City's Public Works Department should prepare a new transportation master plan for Nevada Avenue to connect UCCS with CC and Downtown with multi-modal transportation options. The development of this plan should be closely coordinated with the Master Plan outlined in #1 above. Desired completion date is December 15, 2014.

10. The Executive Branch and City Council should jointly develop and evaluate a toolbox of incentives. As most of the information required will be from the third-party consultant's report, the desired completion date is June 30, 2015.

11. City Council and City Planning should develop "interim" land use codes for the EOZ. Desired completion date is September 30, 2014.

12. City Council and City Planning should develop EOZ regulations that influence desirable uses and design features. As most of the information required will be from the third-party consultant's report, the desired completion date is June 30, 2015.