



Item 6

Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: 5/15/12

Prepared By/Phone Number: 854-4603

Division Director/Manager: Randy Nicholson, AICP

Department Head: Steven M. Manilla, P.E., County Executive-TNR

Sponsoring Court Member: Commissioner Davis, Precinct One
Commissioner Gomez, Precinct Four

AGENDA LANGUAGE: Consider and take appropriate action on the DRAFT Colorado River Corridor Plan and recommended amendments.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

The Commissioners Court approved an Interlocal Agreement with the City of Austin and the Lower Colorado River Authority to develop a long range comprehensive plan for the development of the Colorado River Corridor between Austin and the Travis/Bastrop county line. A DRAFT plan was completed with assistance from the planning firm Bosse Pharis Associates, Inc. Staff held a public meeting and received comments which were posted on the County's web page. The Commissioners Court held a public hearing on March 27 and a work session on April 12. Based on public input and Court discussion, staff is recommending plan amendments as noted in Exhibit 1.

The purpose of the Corridor Plan is to coordinate regional and local planning and private sector investment to facilitate the preservation and enhancement of valuable environmental, economic, recreational, and cultural resources of the plan area over the next 25-30 years. The Corridor Plan includes objectives for improved protection of local bio-diversity, preservation and restoration of floodplains and natural areas; the creation of parks, open spaces and greenways; enhancement of Corridor quality of life through the long-term restoration and reclamation of mined sites; and enhancement of mobility through capital project development and new design alternatives.

Plan implementation requires private sector and intergovernmental cooperation since multiple government entities are responsible for the various aspects of transportation, natural resource conservation, and environmental protection in the Corridor. The Corridor Plan is designed to improve collaboration at the regional and local level, and to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the valuable resources of the Colorado River.

Exhibit 1: Recommended Plan Amendments

Exhibit 2: Web Site Analytics

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends the Colorado Corridor Concept Plan adoption with recommended amendments (Exhibit 1). The final approved document will be updated and posted to the County web site.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Planning involves a certain amount of risk taking. When we engage in planning, we are attempting to shape the future in some desired way, but there can never be an assurance that planning will achieve what we hope it will achieve. We are continually aware of the possibility of failure. The risk elected officials take with specific planning initiatives are obvious and should not be underestimated.

IMPLEMENTATION

A single project or action rarely transforms a community. To be the best it can be, to create an identity and sense of place, the plan calls for sophisticated strategies, a call for actions and initiatives on a number of different fronts and in different geographic areas.

The plan is intended to be used as the basis for making choices. It's about where development should and should not occur, and about the types of development that are appropriate in different areas. There is little doubt, in this day and age, that we will have to be extremely creative and enterprising in identifying sources of public and private funding to implement the plan, and in coming up with innovative way for paying for proposed projects and improvements.

COURT SUPPORT and COMMITMENT

One of the most important ingredients for the Corridor plan is for the community to believe that planning matters, which taking the time to try to think through and envision the kind of places we want our communities to be in the future is important, and that time spent developing plans aimed at fulfilling our aspirations is not wasted. If we are skeptical about the likelihood that projects and improvements envisioned in plans will ever be realized, we are much less likely to take planning seriously. When we don't take the plans we prepare seriously, we undermine the ability of planning to bring about positive change. An inability to believe in planning, and in the possibilities for translating plans into reality, can become a major impediment to successful planning. The plan outlines several strategies to be implemented over the next two years, strategies that are ongoing and more longer term items that may not be addressed for five years or more. It is our hope to be able to look back in twenty

years and realize that something outstanding has been accomplished by this planning effort, something greater than we thought possible at the outset.

CITY OF AUSTIN

City of Austin Watershed Protection Department staff provided a briefing of the draft Colorado River Corridor Plan to the Environmental Board August 17, 2011. The Board recommended the adoption of the plan. COA staff provided a briefing to the Planning Commission on October 11, 2011. The Planning Commission recommended that a briefing also be provided to the Zoning and Platting Commission, the Waterfront Advisory Board, and the Parks Board. COA staff provided a briefing to the Zoning and Platting Commission on November 1, 2011, to the Waterfront Advisory Board on November 14, 2011, and to the Parks Board on December 6, 2011. Staff provided a memo to the City Council summarizing the Colorado River Corridor Plan, and advising them of the proposed schedule for adoption by the Travis County Commissioner's Court.

THE PLAN

The Colorado River Corridor Plan (Corridor Plan) builds upon the extraordinary assets of corridor to address short, medium and long term transportation, parks, and environmental needs. The Corridor Plan integrates the civic qualities of parks and greenbelts and urbanized vibrancy throughout the corridor. It aims to create locations for future cultural destinations, introduce a mix of uses, revitalize mineral extraction areas, establish a new "eco-corridor" and transform the corridor's experience.

The Corridor Plan presents a vision that accommodates new development while protecting the character and environmental quality of the Corridor. New urban areas are sited along major highways (SH 130, SH 71, FM 973 and FM 969 nodes). This relationship is aligned with the CAMPO 2035 "activity centers" concept.

Transportation corridors in the Corridor Plan have been developed with new multi-modal mobility opportunities that currently do not exist within the Corridor. Roadways that accommodate bikes lanes and sidewalks and a regional trails network are proposed to seamlessly connect throughout the area. People living and raising families within the Corridor will find it an inviting place to live, work, and shop, while still moving motorists, cyclists and pedestrians throughout the Corridor.

It is envisioned that transit will be fully integrated within the Corridor and have connectivity to the Austin Bergstrom International Airport and the City of Austin's future Urban Rail stations. Congested roadways are planned to be improved and new connectivity created. FM 969 will become a focal "rural parkway" providing mobility as well as highlighting the visual character of the Colorado River Corridor.

Arterials that front along greenways will take advantage of the rural character that defines the Corridor. New connectivity is also highlighted in the Concept Plan, especially from residential areas east of SH 130. For example, new connections from Austin's Colony to FM 973 are planned as well as a new regional arterial that crosses the Colorado River connecting FM 969 with SH 71.

The envisioned corridor-wide parks and greenway system – centered on the Colorado River, Onion Creek, Gilleland Creek, and other smaller creeks – weaves together developed and undeveloped lands. The intent is to provide the growing population of the corridor with opportunities to enjoy recreational and natural resources close to where they live and to mitigate the environmental impacts of increased impervious cover in watersheds. Recreational facilities will be built at destination parks; boat ramps will be constructed at FM 973 and SH 130 river crossings and at the confluence of Onion Creek with the Colorado River; and long distance hike and bike trails will be developed along the length of the linear greenways. Bottomland woods, grasslands, and wetlands will serve to capture and filter stormwater, recharge ground water, and mitigate flood damage.

With these land patterns, new transportation opportunities, and corridor-wide parks and greenway system, people living and raising families within the corridor will find it an inviting place to work, live, and shop.

The foundation of the Corridor Plan is the analysis of the following key elements outlined below:

1. Land Use
2. Drinking Water and Well Water
3. Transportation
4. Water Quality and Stormwater
5. Parks and Land Conservation

1. LAND USE

The Corridor Plan evaluated over 30,000 acres and 32 Colorado River miles. The current population in the corridor approximately 10,000 with anticipated population growth over 30,000 by 2035. This is double the CAMPO 2035 projected increase of 10,000.

The most dominant land uses in the corridor are mining (resource extraction) estimated at 11,296 acres. TCAD does not list mining operations within a specific land use category; however, there are 6,549 acres of active and inactive mining operations.

The area is experiencing increased residential development. Current residential land area is 2,927 acres.

The conflict between these land uses (noise, traffic, visual impacts, etc.) is likely to continue in the near future as more residential and mining activity are planned in the corridor.

The area in around ABIA within the corridor is heavily impacted by the airport noise contour overlay. Land in this area is being actively purchased or mitigated by the City of Austin. There is a potential to work with the City to develop proper land use control in this area that increases open space and "re-brands" the front door to our city for many tourists and residents.

There is opportunity to plan the progression of land uses. Reclamation of 2,130 acres along SH 130 has been announced by TXI, known as Rio de Vida, the area is expected to have a population of 12,000 to 16,000. These new uses can be anticipated to need orderly transition to accommodate transportation, parks, and storm water facilities. Over half of the acres are proposed to be set aside for green space.

There is opportunity to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by improving bike and pedestrian infrastructure, incentivizing the growth of the number of bicycle and pedestrian commuters, create highly walkable pedestrian-only areas, and introduce new innovative forms of public space such as community gardens, wind energy, and underpass parks.

Rio de Vida and the Water's Edge developments have potential for future City of Austin annexation.

2. DRINKING WATER and WELL WATER SUPPLY

Private wells in the Corridor are numerous and the ability to quantify the quality, exact quantity and map the location of these wells has improved as part of the study.

There is an opportunity through the infrastructure planned for future development (ie., Rio De Vida, Water's Edge, Austin Colony) projects to increase the water, electric and wastewater services in the area.

The County/City/LCRA joint support for establishing baseline well water data in the corridor is underway.

There is opportunity to leverage existing grey water infrastructure to improve water efficiency measures and use of appropriate plant species in public landscapes, enable greywater reuse for landscapes.

3. TRANSPORTATION

Expanse and flood plain of Colorado River limits number of potential crossings and north/south connectivity. Flood Plain crossings drive transportation costs up. Mining lands will preclude potential of a robust roadway network, and extraction methods and material movement will mix industrial and residential traffic.

The Corridor relies heavily on two roadways, FM 969 and SH 71, for access and mobility; these same highways provide mobility to developing areas north and south of the Corridor as well as Bastrop County.

Limited public transit service is provided by Capital Area Rural Transportation Service.

CAMPO's 2035 future land use traffic modeling may have under estimated traffic demands.

Improvements are planned for FM 973 and FM 969, and additional roadway connections were approved in the 2011 Bonds for Gilbert Lane.

There is opportunity to provide major regional north/south arterial connectivity from SH 71 East to the north by providing an additional Colorado River crossing.

There is opportunity to provide a significant amount of hike, bike, and pedestrian facilities along roadways and greenways helping to reduce vehicle trips.

4. STORMWATER AND WATER QUALITY

Of the 30,500 Acres in the corridor approx. 13,000 Acres currently lie within the 2008 FEMA 100 year floodplain.

Floodplain reclamation and modification standards that "retain the integrity of in stream channel stability and ecology, protect riparian areas and minimize damage to the physical and biological characteristics of such areas" need to be considered for land in the corridor.

Water Quality Protection Zones can provide linear spaces that can be incorporated into a comprehensive trail and greenway system.

There is opportunity with the resource extraction process to provide topographic relief that presents opportunities for various micro climates that foster various plant and wildlife development.

There is opportunity for parks to capture and store water, turning them into green water treatment systems.

There is opportunity for the increases use of bioswales near transportation systems and add permanent green corridors.

5. PARKS AND LAND CONSERVATION

The Corridor Plan adds to on the County's initiative to build greenways along Onion and Gilleland creeks beginning in 2005 with voter-approved bond funds.

A funding of land acquisition in the Corridor was approved in the Fall bond election program.

Historically, initiatives for land conservation for non-park purposes in the Corridor and eastern Travis County have not been aggressive. The 2011 Texas State Legislature has given the County new authority to purchase conservation easements. The Corridor is a candidate for the use of this conservation program.

Both the City and the County are exploring improved creek protections that will strengthen opportunities for greenway systems.

The provision of an attractive physical environment, including parks for residents and visitors, as well as providing necessary services and facilities, will attract new residents and businesses to the area.

There is opportunity to develop resiliency plans for the plant and animal life within parks and greenways including the introduction of wildlife corridors and drought-tolerant plants.

Web Site Analytics

Staff has maintained a robust web site with regards to the plan's development. Exhibit 2 provides analytics of the web sites use. Regarding some terminology within the Google Analytics report on website traffic for the CRCP web pages: 'Bounce' rate is the percentage of people whose only interaction with the site is the page in question. If user follows a link from anywhere else within the Travis County website they are not included in the 'Bounce' rate. The 'Bounce' rate for the CRCP web pages is very high – 71% of people who visit the front page go 'back' after they view it or close their browser. 'Exit' rate is the percentage of visitors who quit interacting with the site at the page in question, and is inclusive of users who 'bounce'.

Evaluating the high 'bounce' rate as it correlates to the average time a user spends on the site shows us that the most common user path through the CRCP page is as follows: a user directly accesses the CRCP page which contains the information they

are seeking. They read that page at length, and then they leave. This is a positive experience.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

None

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

Cynthia McDonald	Financial Manager	TNR	854-4239
Steve Manilla	County Executive	TNR	854-9429

CC:

Anna Bowlin	Development Services	TNR	854-7561
Jon White	Natural Resources	TNR	854-7212
Christy Moffett	CDBG Senior Planner	HHS/VS	854-3460
Betty Voights	Executive Director	CAPCOG	916-6000

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0101 - Administrative -

EXHIBIT 1

Colorado Rivers Corridor Plan

April 30, 2012

RECOMMENDED DRAFT PLAN AMENDMENTS

Plan Narrative

1. Page 18. Second paragraph. Delete ~~Of these providers, the City of Austin and Hornsby Bend are the only retail providers from surface water sources.~~ Insert Of these providers, two primarily obtain water from surface water sources. The City of Austin obtains drinking water from storage in Lake Travis and Hornsby Bend diverts water from the Colorado River.
2. Page 20. Under Opportunities include statement: As a part of implementation, planners could look at the viability of projects to enhance aquifer recharge.
3. Page 27. Under Inadequate Road Capacity add bullet: Truck traffic from the mining project exacerbates the inadequate road capacity. This negatively affects local residents and commuters by contributing to traffic congestion and extended travel times.
4. Page 27. Under Safety, revise sentence: The mix of local traffic, commuting traffic and ~~through truck traffic along FM 969~~ is another major challenge within the Corridor.
5. Page 47 Parks and Greenways Objective, change strategy: Provide opportunities for the community to vote for funding of land acquisition of critical lands along the river” to 5-15 time frame. Voters approve an initial level of funding in November 2011.
6. Page 51. Mobility Objective, delete safety strategy: ~~Construct two left turn lanes at Hunters Bend Road to FM 969. Work has been completed by TXDOT.~~
7. Page 51 Mobility Objective, delete safety strategy: ~~Seek funding to provide alternative collector access to Hornsby-Dunlap Elementary School and Dailey Middle School Approved by voters in November 2011.~~
8. Page 53. Bicycles/Ped Objective delete strategy: ~~Seek funding to complete sidewalk gap along Hunters Bend Road from Austin Colony to Red Tails. Approved by voters in November 2011.~~

Colorado River Corridor Concept Plan, Page 40

1. Remove pathway shown adjacent to the Travis County Jail.
2. Add a future pathway along SH 130 to connect to SH 71 East.
3. Add a future transit node at Harold Green Rd and SH 130.
4. Amend to reflect the proposed land use intensity shown on page 22. In the body of the CRCP, page 22, there is a section titled Existing Transportation System which contains a map labeled Development. This map shows Subdivisions, Preliminary Plats and Emerging Developments.
5. Amend to show the approved unrecorded final plat for Austin's Colony Phase V Section 3. A future rural arterial (Deaf Smith Blvd.) is aligned through this plat. Travis County will be required to negotiate with the owner to amend the unrecorded final plat to accommodate the alignment of the future arterial.
6. Amend to show Future Arterial C as a Rural Arterial (light blue). Amend Concept Plan to show future Arterial C north of Hunters Bend Road offset from Arterial C south of Hunters Bend Road. Alignment of Arterial C south of Hunters Bend Road remains as shown on Concept Plan Amend Arterial C north of Hunters Bend Road to follow existing Hallday Avenue and extend northward to terminus at FM 969. Travis County will be required to negotiate with the owner Austin's Colony Phases 6A and 6B to accommodate the future alignment of Arterial C north of Hunters Bend Road.
7. Amend to show the approved preliminary plat for Austin's Colony Phases 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13. Amend alignment of Deaf Smith Blvd to reflect alignment in Austin's Colony Phases 9, 10, 11 and 12. Amend Concept Plan to terminate Deaf Smith Blvd. at future Arterial C. Delete section of Deaf Smith Blvd. from Future Arterial C

EXHIBIT 1 Colorado Rivers Corridor Plan

April 30, 2012

to Dunlap Rd. North. See Community comment for #162 for alignment through Austin's Colony Phase V Section 3.

8. Amend to show current alignment of Austin Colony Secondary Access project that was included in 2011 voter approved bond election. Amend extension of Sandifer Street to parallel Elm Creek flood plain. A roadway parallel to the floodplain visually integrates the greenspace into the neighborhood and puts more eyes on the greenway users which improve safety. Also, amend roadway classification of future Sandifer Street extension from Minor Arterial to Neighborhood Collector (green).

With limited options for east/west connectivity to FM 973 and expected high volumes of traffic connecting to work destinations in the Urban Core, Transportation and Natural Resources staff have identified the need to study the use of roundabouts as a traffic safety measure to calm traffic. As plans develop for Rio de Vida, future collector level intersections would offer an opportunity apply this traffic calming technique especially for collector intersections west of Austin's Colony subdivision.

9. Amend to show separate park parcels along the Colorado River, 1) City of Austin Parcel and 2) Austin Colony Home Owners Association (HOA) parcel.

Pages

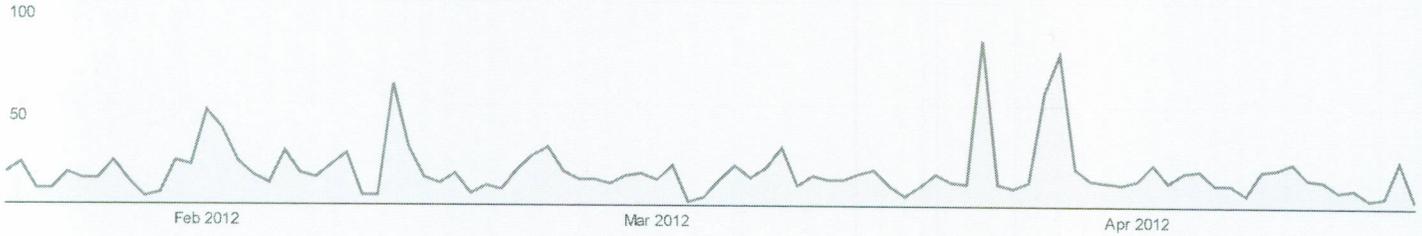
Jan 19, 2012 - Apr 19, 2012

100.00% of total pageviews

Explorer

Site Usage

Pageviews



Pageviews

1,568

% of Total: 0.06% (2,773,701)

Unique Pageviews

1,232

% of Total: 0.06% (2,000,151)

Avg. Time on Page

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Site Avg: 00:02:03 (156.09%)

Bounce Rate

71.39%

Site Avg: 54.90% (30.05%)

% Exit

56.89%

Site Avg: 39.50% (44.01%)

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2. /tnr/crcp/default.asp	387	318	00:01:21	52.17%	32.04%
3. /TNR/crcp/draft_plan.asp	209	170	00:03:34	58.62%	52.15%
4. /tnr/crcp/map.asp	89	70	00:02:44	50.00%	44.94%
5. /tnr/crcp/draft_plan.asp	44	34	00:03:40	62.50%	45.45%
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9. /404.html?page=/crcp&from=	1	1	00:00:00	0.00%	0.00%
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Rows 1 - 10 of 17