

Meridian Visioning Session

Introduction

A visioning session was held on May 10, 2016 to talk about the future of Meridian Avenue. The session began with a brief introduction of the context and constraints that shape the conversation around Meridian Avenue. Then participants divided into groups and rotated through a series of timed tables focused on four topics: The Great Green and Environment; Parking and Circulation; Events Integration; and Buildings. Each table was guided by a facilitator; a note taker documented the exchange of ideas on a flip chart; and questions were provided for each topic to help direct dialogue. To conclude the visioning session, facilitators compiled the talking points and shared the key items from the breakout sessions together as one large group.

Major themes addressed were:

- The desire for close, convenient parking versus campus accessibility, including bike and pedestrian access and safety
- Preserving open space versus programmatic needs of growth
- Showcasing CSU's culture of sustainability and campus values
- Understanding the on-campus stadium as part of the Meridian context, but not allowing it to drive the conversation

The session was well-attended, and the process received positive feedback from participants. They commented that the session was collaborative and professional. Constituents felt they had been heard, and wanted to see more of this type of collective, creative interaction in future university planning processes.

Facilitators

- **Dave Bradford**, Director, Parking and Transportation Services, CSU
- **Susanne Cordery**, Environmental Engineer, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Amanda Fitzpatrick**, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Parking and Transportation Services, CSU
- **Aaron Fodge**, Alternative Transportation Manager, Parking and Transportation Services, CSU
- **Fred Haberecht**, Assistant Director and University Planner, Facilities Management, CSU
- **David Hansen**, University Landscape Architect, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Jessica Kramer**, Landscape Architect and Environmental Graphic Designer, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Megan Miller**, Intern Architect, Facilities Management, CSU

Note-Takers

- **Lindsay Brown**, Assistant to the University Architect, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Julia Innes**, Administrative Assistant, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Annie Roark**, Project Coordinator, Facilities Management, CSU
- **Becca Wren**, Executive Assistant, Facilities Management, CSU

Participants

- **Emily Allen**, Community Liaison, CSU & City of Fort Collins
- **Dezarai Brubaker**, Director, Conference and Event Services, CSU
- **Rick Callan**, CSURF—Senior Real Estate Analyst
- **Dave Carpenter**, Director of Operations, College of Health & Human Sciences, CSU
- **Joy Childress**, Coordinator, Traffic & Bike Education & Enforcement Program, Police Department, CSU
- **Colin Day**, Project Manager, Institute for the Built Environment, College of Health & Human Sciences, CSU
- **Jim Dolak**, Executive Director, Housing and Dining Services, CSU
- **Cody Frye**, Director, Campus Recreation, CSU
- **Stephanie G'Schwind**, Director, Center for Literary Publishing, English Department, CSU
- **Scott Harris**, Chief of Police, Police Department, CSU
- **Jason Holland**, City Planner, City of Fort Collins
- **Doug Max**, Senior Associate Director, Athletics Department, CSU
- **Mary Beth McCubbin**, Assistant Professor/Landscape Architect, Horticulture and Landscape Architecture, CSU
- **Svetlana Olbina**, Associate Professor, Construction Management, CSU
- **Ken Quintana**, University Emergency Management Coordinator, Environmental Health Services, Housing and Dining Services, CSU
- **Joe Parker**, Athletic Director, Athletics Department, CSU
- **Allison Penfield**, Assistant Director, Resources for Disable Students, CSU
- **Rick Pott**, Facility Planner, Housing and Dining Services, CSU
- **Tom Satterly**, Associate Vice President, CSU Facilities Management
- **Arthur Sintar**, Associate Director of Business Development, Ascend, CSU
- **Mari Strombom**, Associate Executive Director, Housing and Dining Services, CSU
- **Timothy Wilder**, Service Development Manager, City of Fort Collins

Summary of Breakout Sessions

Great Green/Environment

The groups that attended the Great Green and Environment table were provided with the existing configuration and constraints of the Great Green, including floodplain, intramural fields usage, view shed, and future geothermal system. Participants were asked to brainstorm what the Great Green's character and core functions should be, how it would support the view shed, how it can complement CSU's core tenet of sustainability, and how it can enhance inclusivity on campus. They were asked whether the Great Green should have a prescribed build-to line, and what the fate of Hartshorn should be.

The participants had all had experience with the Great Green and appreciated its significance as an asset to the University. There was general consensus around some themes and diverging opinions on others. The following paragraphs summarize the results of discussions.

Most people spoke in favor of enhancing the Great Green's appeal to diverse users. The suggestion of "park pockets" along the edges of the area and the addition of shade and benches was echoed several times and met with general enthusiasm. Likewise, the addition of signage, interpretive information, and educational items relating to sustainability was a recurring theme, with ideas such as an app or scanable code to showcase aspects of CSU's sustainable initiatives, including the solar panels on top of the Rec Center, the future geothermal system, the floodplain, etc.

The Shields Road/campus interface received a variety of comments. Most agreed that the fence along Shields should be removed, a more welcoming view into campus be provided, and the South Drive/Shields intersection improved. Many participants liked the idea of converting the practice field into a soccer field, sunken, with earthen berms. One participant suggested converting the practice field into parking to advance the idea of pushing parking to the campus perimeter. Suggestions for South Drive included making it wider, meandering, and more like a "boulevard" with trees and benches, consistent with the park-like concept of the Great Green.

Participants discussed the Meridian connection, whether it should traverse campus, and if so how it should pass through the Great Green. A slightly curving route from the Rec Center to the northeast corner of the stadium was sketched. Also, a walkway from the Lory Student Center plinth to the stadium entrance was sketched and promoted as a welcoming passage for event days.

Several commenters suggested natural enhancements to the Great Green and environs. Specifically, adding living walls onto the stadium, re-configuring the lagoon into a more natural feature without a concrete edge, and making the area around the lagoon a more naturalistic setting.

Participants were split on whether the Great Green should have a well-defined build-to line like Central Park or whether it should have fingers that reach out into different parts of campus. Regardless, most participants agreed that trees around the edge of the Great Green would soften it and enhance peoples' experiences.

One participant suggested moving Jack Christianson track to the Great Green to consolidate sport functions, and using the vacated space for multistory buildings.

The participants were evenly divided on whether the fate of the Hartshorn parcel should be open space or buildings.

Parking and Circulation

The Parking and Circulation breakout table provided rich conversation about the enhancement of the Meridian Corridor with respects to accessibility, re-alignment, and user experience. The following thematic areas encapsulate the conversation.

Theme 1: Multimodal Corridor without Personal Vehicle Access

The Colorado State University Master Plan outlines the permanent closure of the Meridian Corridor between University and Plum to personal vehicle travel while re-designing the corridor for multi-modal transportation use—specifically transit, bicycle, and walking. Likewise, the groups believed the space should be flexible in design to support police, fire, Resources for Disabled Students (RDS), and move-in congestion.

The table yielded a general consensus supporting the transformation of the corridors to support a multi-modal model. Each group actively discussed how the corridor could be reconstructed from widening the road to separate transit from bikes and pedestrians to a *shared street* concept, providing a highly-adaptable space for events, move-in, or congestion relief.

Specific attention was given to the Plum and Meridian intersection as a gateway to campus with consideration for pedestrian control (walls, roundabout, barn-dance) in the intersection, and the addition of a significant wayfinding gateway where the corridor becomes multi-modal.

Theme 2: Re-Alignment Opportunities with Meridian

The session generated a variety of creative re-alignment suggestions for Meridian afforded with the construction of the stadium, a Whitcomb extension, and redevelopment of Aylesworth. The alignments below consider a return to green space with the old alignment of Meridian to be abandoned. The general consensus of the groups recommended that any future alignment should seek to eliminate unnecessary turns and stops for transit.

Alignments for Meridian

Existing Alignment	The existing alignment heads directly into the north end of the stadium. The alignment could still be modified to a shared space or to separated transit/bicycle corridors.
Whitcomb Extension to University	This alignment extends Whitcomb from Pitkin through the library lot to University Avenue. This would provide transit access to the core of campus while preserving the segment of Meridian from University to Pitkin for a stadium park on the northside.
Whitcomb Extension Past Lagoon	Much like the alignment above, this would expend Whitcomb parallel to the Lagoon connecting to Plum.
Expand Mountain Loop	By shifting the library parking lot west, the mountain loop could be expanded to add a transit corridor that parallels the mountain loop from South Drive and past the Lagoon to Plum. This would provide closer access to the campus core.

Theme 3: Enhanced Entrance to Stadium

The groups explored the idea of permanently closing off the area on the existing Meridian between Pitkin and University as a “Grand Boulevard” to the stadium. The closure would require a re-alignment of Meridian to accomplish this vision.

Participants would like to see the area returned to greenspace or transformed into a plaza between Aylesworth and Newsom, including appropriately-sized trees and pathways with a funneling effect into the stadium.

Theme 4: Accessibility Demands for This Area

The need to preserve handicap parking and access near the corridor was discussed. While the use of personal vehicles for cross-campus trips was discouraged, the groups advocated for extended transit

(Horn) service or smaller shuttles/vehicles, including golf carts, to this area of campus, along with sufficient handicap parking in the remaining parking lots, stadium, and student housing redevelopment.

Theme 5: Parking Alternatives near Prospect and Whitcomb

The CSU Master Plan calls for future parking capacity on the perimeter of campus. While the groups generally agreed that parking should remain on the perimeter, it was suggested that a parking structure be added to support any redevelopment of Aylesworth and Newsom. A perimeter parking garage at Whitcomb and Prospect would support the parking needs on the south side of campus while serving game day needs on the perimeter of campus. (This location would require taking additional residential housing.)

Events Integration

Participants expressed concern over the utilization of space on campus during events. They observed that one argument for building the stadium on campus was to engage people in exploring CSU, specifically visitors. Dialogue included isolating and containing people to just one area or hub for events versus dispersing people over the full available campus space, so there will be less trampling of green space. They wondered if centering activities in one place discouraged people from walking all over campus, detracting from the goal of experiencing the entire campus.

The group emphasized the importance of providing year-round, multi-purpose use of the Meridian Avenue space, accounting for normal days as well as special events. The walk from the Great Green to the stadium is considered a prime opportunity for welcoming people onto campus. There was consensus that the design of Meridian Avenue will need to focus on the everyday space that's central to the resident halls, surrounding the south end of Meridian. Design focus should not be the result of stadium events, which occur sporadically compared to residential life.

Participants also asked for a balance of concrete versus green space. They agreed that Meridian should not have more concrete than the Lory Student Plaza. They pictured Hartshorn as CSU's future iconic space—as a “sister to the Oval.” They thought it was important to showcase CSU's pride as a university leader in creating green and LEED campus space. In doing so, they thought we could emphasize CSU's climate action plan through design, magnify the pedestrian experience, and highlight alternative modes of transportation as one of our continued strengths.

Visual aesthetics also shaped the group's conversation. A common observation was that Meridian shouldn't look like a street, especially because large sections of it are not open to traffic, particularly toward the south end. They suggested renaming Meridian Avenue to a term that doesn't evoke the idea of a road that one can drive on (i.e. “avenue”). There was, furthermore, a desire to visually separate the modes on Meridian. Participants envisioned the character of Meridian evolving as one moves along the length of it; the pedestrian, bicyclist, and vehicle's experience of Meridian will transform as one moves from north to south. Examples of visual change could include designing the north section of Meridian to look like a main street with a possible tree archway to welcome people onto campus. The Pitkin-South Drive section of Meridian could exist as more of a town square with student services located within the space. The front entrance area of the stadium should have the feeling that CSU is “rolling out the carpet” in welcome. A plaza, lit for night games, could culminate at the south side of Meridian.

Additionally, the group wanted to provide “peaceful” spaces for those not participating in events, incorporating a sensitivity to non-game day participants by providing a privacy or buffer zone through landscaping to help manage tailgating noise and other activities. Discussion developed into how passive branding and wayfinding could play a central role in telling people where to go on Meridian: written signage versus alternative types of visual cues. People thought spaces on campus with purposeful branding could encourage community space, facilitating a sense of belonging for community members and visitors. Specific places on campus that represent community will also help people to always know where to go, for first time visits to campus, but especially during special events.

Buildings

There was a consensus among the participants in regards to whether or not there should be specific architectural controls for buildings immediately surrounding the Great Green. Many of the responses were directly related to the redevelopment of Newsom/Aylesworth. Buildings along the Meridian Corridor shall follow a set of architectural guidelines developed specifically for this unique campus location. The intent of the guidelines will be to address build-to lines and setbacks; height and massing in relation to the building’s surroundings; and views both in and out of specific developments. Natural build-to lines, which are implied along the southern edge of South Drive with the Academic Village development and Eddy Hall, should be combined with setbacks to accommodate existing utilities and mature trees as necessary. The intent is not to create a formal hard edge, but to maintain the South Drive view shed and provide an inviting edge with appropriately managed density. This can be of a greater scale along the south near the stadium than the north along the Great Green between Lake Street and South Drive with useful spaces among buildings. Buildings may also encroach onto South Drive as they move further east away from the Great Green. The form of each building should take into account the views it will frame in each direction (north, south, east, west) as the Meridian Corridor is a passageway to Student Life, Academics, and Athletics, which are all to be treated with equal levels of importance.

It was unanimous that all housing developments should follow the “Village Way” concept, seen in both Academic and Laurel Villages, with pedestrian connections activated by useful indoor-outdoor spaces. Maintaining this type of housing within the housing district will unify this area of campus and assist with connecting the students living on the west side of Meridian to those living to the east through community and an internal pedestrian-way separate from the roadside sidewalks.

There was not a clear consensus on the ratio of housing versus mixed-use or academic space for the redevelopment of Newsom/Aylesworth. There was concern over who would pay for a non-housing related program and where the faculty and staff who currently work in Aylesworth would relocate to when their departments are already spread across campus. It was clear that the Newsom/Aylesworth redevelopment needs to incorporate more than just housing, but to what degree is to be determined. The following are ideas proposed by participants: There is a need to balance additional students with staff and faculty while maintaining high caliber academic space. Housing and Dining will require both the Newsom and Aylesworth sites to meet the projected future enrollment. The site will also need to support the multi-purpose stadium with multi-use space on the ground level along the Meridian Corridor.

Structured parking was preferred by the groups along with condensing the lot west of Hartshorn to the east, integrating it with the library lot. All surface parking should be multi-use near Meridian for game day events (tailgating, concerts, etc.) and remaining parking should be in structures to protect potential

academic and green space. Ideally, Lory Student Center and the Morgan Library would have available structured parking with access to the Horn.

It was nearly a perfect split among the groups on whether Hartshorn should be redeveloped and if it was, what it would look like. The responses ranged from temporary flex space for future redevelopment; immediate redevelopment prior to redeveloping Aylesworth; maintaining Hartshorn as a building site; and an intimate park to an extension of the Great Green, if it were to become green space. If Hartshorn is to remain a building site, it should not remain empty; the University is too tight on space and there are many departments that could benefit from some temporary space until a permanent solution is found. Once redeveloped, the building should not impede on current view sheds (Library, Great Green, etc.) and should be on the southern edge of the site without parking on the west allowing for more green space. Density shall be considerate of the Lagoon and Great Green, but greater than the current building. One potential use for the redevelopment of this site could be CSUPD with the proximity to the stadium and Lake Street. Maintaining the Hartshorn site as a building location also provides a potential emergency refuge location if the stadium needs to be evacuated. If Hartshorn is deconstructed and the site is not redeveloped, then the green space should be an extension of the Great Green with its own identity. Potentially it would include more social shaded lawns, addressing the west side of the Morgan Library and the Housing District also. This will be the only chance to extend the Great Green.

Everyone felt this area of campus is already inclusive and with the addition of wayfinding graphics and multi-use paving this inclusivity will be maintained.

Suggested Next Steps

1. Develop a framework-plan that addresses key points from the visioning session, including visuals such as the alignment of Meridian, as well as setbacks on the Great Green.
2. Discuss the framework-plan in a charrette environment, and schedule a follow up meeting with the participants from the original visioning session.
3. Based on a charrette model, present the findings of the visioning session process to the Master Plan Committee.