

Name (optional): Laura Kaplan

Organization (optional): City of Boulder Planning Board

Email (optional): laura.kaplan.pb@gmail.com

Phone (optional):

My question or feedback most closely relates to the following topic (please choose one): 5 | City Manager's Office/City Policy

Comment, question or feedback:

Dear members of City Council,

I am writing to you in my roles as a member of Planning Board (PB) and as the PB liaison to the Boulder Municipal Airport Community Conversation. PB has approved the following message (below the line of asterisks) to convey to you our shared concerns and recommendations regarding the current scope and design of the Airport Community Conversation. Quoting from the letter below, "we feel that it is imperative that the scope of the pre-Master Plan Airport Community Conversation include presentation of housing and hybrid options for community consideration."

It is our strong recommendation that the Airport Community Conversation stand up diverse visions ("scenarios") for the airport including continuation / improvement of the airport, conversion of the land to housing and neighborhood serving uses, and some hybrid of both airport and housing; then evaluate all the scenarios on a level playing field against the same criteria; and bring these scenarios to the community for input before seeking Council direction on the future of this 178 acres of public land. Critically, the city and community should have a good sense of whether or not there is a desire to repurpose this site for housing BEFORE we go into the next airport master plan update that will serve to guide what would likely be significant aviation-focused capital improvements over the next 10 years.

Please see the detailed message from Planning Board below, passed last night on a unanimous 5-0 vote (members Boone and Smith absent). Please consider agendaing this item for consideration / nod of five to provide majority council direction to staff at a City Council meeting in the near future. I would be glad to attend any such meeting as the PB liaison to the Airport Community Conversation, speak to PB's concerns and recommendations, and answer any questions.

-Laura Kaplan

Dear members of City Council and City Manager Rivera-Vandermyde,

We, the members of the City of Boulder Planning Board, are writing to express our concerns and recommendations regarding the recently initiated Airport Community Conversation. We recognize that it is no easy task to scope and sequence conversations like these to meet a variety of needs and expectations. We appreciate the project team's hard work and good faith efforts to date. We look forward to seeing the evolution of this process.

PROJECT DESIGN & CONCERNS

We have serious concerns about the Airport Community Conversation's scope as currently described and implemented by staff and consultants (the project team).

According to the project's Draft Charter, the Community Conversation is intended "to learn what the community's aspirations and goals are for the future of the airport and provide city leadership with a community-supported scenario and next steps to guide future planning of the airport." However, as currently scoped, the project will not include exploration of housing or a housing/airport hybrid on this site.

As described to City Council at the study session on January 12, 2023, the project team will work with a Community Working Group (CWG) to create a set of three to four scenarios to take out to the broader Boulder community for feedback through a series of open houses and a Be Heard Boulder survey. After analyzing community input, the project team intends to recommend one or more "preferred scenario(s)" to Council. This Community Conversation has been described by the project team as a precursor to the upcoming update of the Airport Master Plan. As such, this Community Conversation has long-range land use planning implications.

Of principal concern to Planning Board, the project team has recently stated that the set of scenarios to be developed will not include any scenarios describing a future use of the airport site for housing and neighborhood-serving uses, nor will any scenario describe a hybrid combination of airport and housing uses. The project team considers such scenarios to be out of scope for this Community Conversation; they state that the range of scenarios presented to the public will end at "decommission the airport" with no context about what might replace the

airport. According to the project team, any structured community discussion of what might replace the airport would be a future project.

We think it prudent to consider the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan's (BVCP) direction in section 6.23: "At the time of the next Airport Master Plan, the city will work with the community to reassess the potential for developing a portion of the airport for housing and neighborhood-serving uses."

Planning Board is on record with a unanimous 7-0 vote on August 16, 2022, recommending that the City conduct a robust alternatives analysis and community engagement process specifically to fulfill BVCP 6.23 to reassess the potential for housing and neighborhood serving uses at the airport at the time of the Airport Master Plan update.

Given this background of BVCP 6.23 and the August 16 Planning Board recommendation, and given that the Community Conversation is designed to inform the upcoming update of the Airport Master Plan, it would be logical and expected for city staff to include housing alternatives in the scope of this year-long, consultant-supported Airport Community Conversation "to learn what the community's aspirations and goals are for the future of the airport and provide city leadership with a community-supported scenario and next steps to guide future planning of the airport".

It is unclear to what extent Council members explicitly understood during your January 12, 2023 study session that developing housing scenarios would be excluded from this Community Conversation. It is also unclear at this time whether staff are affirmatively committed to a future project to assess the potential for housing at the airport site, what such a follow-on project would look like, and how it would be sequenced with the Airport Master Plan update.

Planning Board believes that BVCP 6.23's direction to assess the potential for housing and neighborhood-serving uses on this site is worthy of meaningful community consideration. It may well be that developing housing on the airport site is infeasible, or that community members prefer the benefits of retaining and improving our municipal airport. We must have the conversation in order to fairly and carefully consider the pros, cons, benefits, costs, and impacts of a potential change in land use. In our view, the time for this conversation is now, prior to the update of the Airport Master Plan. Importantly, we need to have this conversation prior to any decision to significantly upgrade or add to the airport infrastructure, beyond the minimum needed to maintain safe operations.

CONNECTION TO AIRPORT MASTER PLAN

Staff has moved up the timeline of the next Airport Master Plan update to 2024. According to Boulder Municipal Airport Manager John Kinney, the Airport Master Plan process cannot and will not consider alternatives to aviation uses. All airport master plans in the U.S. follow a tightly prescribed process mapped out by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that focuses on improving and growing aviation-serving uses and facilities.

Since consideration of housing uses cannot be included in the Airport Master Plan process itself as dictated by the FAA, it is therefore very concerning to us that it is also excluded from this recently convened Airport Community Conversation, which is intended to set the stage for the Airport Master Plan.

John Kinney has stated that the airport is in a state of ageing and disrepair that will require millions of dollars of investment (either from grants or new airport-generated revenues) to fix. It would not make much sense from a financial, staff capacity, environmental, or community trust perspective for the City to decide upon potentially millions of dollars-worth of airport infrastructure upgrades prior to having a meaningful conversation with the community about the potential for future housing uses on the airport site.

If the City intends to support BVCP 6.23, we feel that it is imperative that the scope of the pre-Master Plan Airport Community Conversation include presentation of housing and hybrid options for community consideration. We find that including an assessment of housing potential in the Airport Community Conversation would be an effective and efficient way to use to community and staff resources. We do not see any benefit to the community from delaying or separating the conversation about potential housing uses from the current Airport Community Conversation that is specifically intended to inform the upcoming Airport Master Plan update.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We recommend that the scenarios to be considered through the Airport Community Conversation include at minimum one housing scenario, and one hybrid scenario (by which we mean combining some airport uses and some housing uses in the same scenario). In order to provide a level playing field, the housing and hybrid scenarios would need to be analyzed and described at the same level of detail as the consultant-developed airport-only scenarios. In the event that the project team presents their conclusions regarding a “preferred scenario(s)” to Council, we recommend that they provide Council with detailed information about the complete set of scenarios as well as the analysis used to compare those scenarios and arrive at a preferred scenario(s).

2. Should staff determine that it is not possible to produce housing and hybrid scenarios per recommendation #1 above, we recommend rethinking the goal/outcome of the Community Conversation process. In such case, we recommend that selecting a preferred scenario should NOT be the goal of the Community Conversation, because any “preferred future scenario” selected from an artificially constrained set of options cannot possibly reflect informed community opinions.

In such case, the Airport Community Conversation open houses and Be Heard Boulder survey should be used to collect input on a variety of options and present a summary of that data to City Council. This should include the project team’s intended range of airport-centric scenarios, as well as a robust narrative description of housing potential on the site, with public input solicited about both. The project team should work with the CWG members and the existing appointed liaisons from the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB), Housing Advisory Board (HAB), and Planning Board to craft a fair and balanced set of materials – including a narrative descriptive of housing potential – to use in the open houses and Be Heard Boulder survey. We believe this can be thoughtfully done without adding to the timeline or staff workload, and in fact may reduce the burden on staff to respond to community concerns about the current narrow scope.

3. Should City Council agree for any reason that reassessing the potential for housing and neighborhood-serving uses per BVCP 6.23 should be completely out of scope and should not be considered in a meaningful way through this Community Conversation, we recommend that the City communicate clearly and transparently about how and when the housing conversation will occur, how it will relate to the outputs of this current Airport Community Conversation, and how it will inform the upcoming Airport Master Plan update.

4. In all cases, we recommend that staff communicate proactively, clearly, transparently, and neutrally about the City’s commitment to work with the community to reassess the potential for housing and neighborhood-serving uses at the airport site per BVCP 6.23.

Thank you for hearing our concerns and considering our recommendations. We are optimistic that the City can find a path forward that will resolve our concerns, provide clarity, and generate community trust. If you have questions, please contact Planning Board’s liaison to the Airport Community Conversation, Laura Kaplan.

This letter was approved by the Planning Board with a unanimous 5-0 vote (Board members Boone and Smith absent) on April 4, 2023.

BVCP CONSISTENCY

We submit that good faith exploration of the potential for housing and neighborhood-serving uses on the airport site per BVCP 6.23 is consistent with at least two major focus areas of the last BVCP update, “Housing Affordability and Diversity” and “Growth – Balance of Future Jobs and Housing”. It is further consistent with the BVCP’s considerable emphasis on housing including the following policies:

- 7.01 Local Solutions to Affordable Housing
- 7.02 Affordable Housing Goals
- 7.07 Mixture of Housing Types
- 7.10 Housing for a Full Range of Households
- 7.11 Balancing Housing Supply with Employment Base
- 7.17 Market Affordability