

73rd and Lowell Change of Use: Outcome of the October 17 City Council Study Session

On Monday, October 17 Economic Development staff reviewed the community process and recommended change of use with the Westminster City Council during a Study Session.

Staff reviewed the history of the site, the status of the site as a federalized property and the history of attempted development since 2004. The presentation and conversation with Councillors provided an overview of information assembled during the four community meetings held between August 4 and September 14 and the identification of community needs and “wish list” items that were suggested by area residents. Staff shared that a number of area residents participating in the community meetings noted that housing is still a critical need for Historic Westminster and all of the city, and offered to explore and support a change of use for the three corner parcels to a vibrant neighborhood event space and open-air market that will be available and enjoyed by all area residents inasmuch as the programmed use provides food access, arts market and community events identified during the community meetings.

City Council members asked a number of questions to clarify what is needed to begin work to design and develop an event space that “largely matched the vision presented by the Heart of Westminster” and served community interests identified. As City Councillors do not vote during a Study Session, they provided verbal direction that staff begin work to assemble more information to reprogram the site, including:

- Perform required filing with HUD to officially change the designation of the site from Housing to a new low- and-moderate-income benefit for area residents;
- Work with internal professionals and consultants to perform an analysis of proposed use;
- Develop an operations plan and determine resource and management needs to implement the plan, and
- Redevelop the site with landscaping and platform structures to host open air markets and events by Spring 2023.

The City Council did not indicate a willingness to pay back HUD for the site in order to remove the property from Federal requirements and expressed an interest in learning if future CDBG funds could be used to support the community event space. Council did indicate that they would like to know what it would cost to pay HUD back in the event that the upcoming analysis demonstrates that the City should pursue a different direction for the corner property. Options for the three parcels south of the Penguin Building were touched upon and Council members asked that staff learn if the southern site could be used for parking.

Given this direction, staff will work with HUD to create a program under the City’s filed CDBG Consolidated Plan to support this use and formally change the HUD designation of this site to Low-and-Moderate Area (LMA) benefit for community event space.

Staff will host an update meeting with the community in early 2023 as we set up the project plan to begin the design work. We look forward to continued consultation and alignment with community interests as we shape this exciting new community amenity.