



# Issues and Opportunities Summary

March 2015

## Overview

This document provides an initial summary of key issues and opportunities to be addressed as part of the Milliken Comprehensive Plan and Resiliency Update process. Issues and opportunities listed reflect input received as part of initial stakeholder interviews held in January 2015. Interviews were conducted with community stakeholders representing a variety of interest groups: BOOST Committee members, Thompson River Recreation District, Milliken Business Association/Downtown Business owners, Milliken Housing Authority, Greeley Habitat for Humanity, Town Departments, Town Board and Commission members, and many others.

This summary is not intended to be all encompassing—rather it reflects a preliminary summary of major themes raised during the January meetings. Additional detail and discussion regarding specific issues will be incorporated as part of the forthcoming Trends and Forces Report based on supplemental research conducted by members of the project team.

## Flood Recovery/Resiliency

- **BOOST recommendations:** In late 2014, the town’s “BOOST” or Building on Strengths Traditions Flood Recovery and Resiliency committee concluded their nearly yearlong effort with five-year recommendations in four key areas: economic development; emergency preparedness; housing and infrastructure; and parks, education, recreation, and culture. These recommendations reflect substantial input from a broad cross-section of the community, but have not been considered by the Town Board. They are intended to be vetted more broadly and refined as part of the plan update process and ultimately integrated as part of the new Comprehensive Plan.
- **2014 Flood Plain Mapping:** In March 2014, the town, working in conjunction with FEMA, adopted new floodplain mapping initiated as a result of the 2013 flood. As a result of the updated mapping, two of the town’s mobile home parks are now located in the flood plain and are proposed for acquisition. Depending upon the outcome of the proposed acquisition process, households will either be relocated (with assistance) or will stay in their current location and provided additional protection from future flood events through a combination of storm drainage improvements. The town wishes to establish a new Flood Hazard Overlay (on the Framework Plan) as part of the plan update process to ensure careful consideration is given to existing and future uses within the flood plain and that future risk to life and property is minimized.
- **Improving the Road Network:** During the 2013 floods, bridges were washed out that made travel and evacuation challenging. This was especially true at the intersection of Hwy. 60 & Hwy. 257 on the west side. The future Milliken must ensure that it has a road network in place to meet future needs and provide reliable travel following another major hazard event.

## Growth and Development

- **Permit activity/market demand:** Residential building permit activity has been ramping back up over the past year (98 new construction permits in 2014 and the town projects approximately 80 in 2015). While demand for growth is expected to remain strong for the foreseeable future, several factors will influence where and how quickly it occurs, including: ownership patterns/adopted plans and water and infrastructure availability/affordability.
- **Ownership patterns/adopted plans:** Much of the town’s planning area is part of a single Planned Unit Development (PUD)—the Centennial Master Plan—that is being developed incrementally over time. Originally platted over 15 years ago, some portions of the original PUD are now being replatted/rezoned from industrial to single-family residential housing to allow for the development of a recreational facility and additional housing in a primarily residential neighborhood. Construction of multi-family housing in an area zoned for that use as part of the PUD is also getting underway.
- **Employment opportunities:** Demand for industrial/employment opportunities has increased over the past year, particularly in the eastern portion of the urban growth area. This demand has spurred possible changes to the Framework Plan and accompanying zoning to support industrial uses at the confluence of the rail lines southeast of Settlers Village and other targeted locations. While these uses are generally supported in the locations proposed as an economic development and diversification tool, implementation will require a significant investment in infrastructure (See Infrastructure and Services), coordination with the 2013 South Platte River Corridor Master Plan and accompanying floodplain restrictions, and consideration of new standards for industrial development as part of the town’s development code. During the comprehensive plan update, it will be important to recognize the unique opportunities in Milliken. Much of the recent industrial development has been related to Oil and Gas activity, which is a major driver of both growth and the Town’s budget. The Town needs to continue to capitalize on the opportunities presented by oil and gas development but also identify ways to diversify its economic and fiscal bases so it is not too dependent on the industry.

## Housing

- **Overall housing mix:** The need to expand the range of housing options in Milliken was noted by many participants. In particular, options that allow families to “move-up” as their families expand or their incomes grow, entry-level/workforce housing, and affordable senior housing were all cited as areas of particular need. In terms of housing types, the need for alternatives to detached single-family homes were noted, such as apartments and attached options like townhomes or patio homes. The town commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment in August 2014 to inform the discussion and help pinpoint specific issues and opportunities to be addressed.
- **Housing for seniors and older adults:** Many stakeholders emphasized the need for additional housing options for older adults and seniors that enable residents to age in place. The Dove Valley senior housing complex was cited by numerous participants as a successful model for the community to build upon. Milliken Housing Authority members noted they are exploring opportunities to develop a second senior/affordable housing complex, drawing from the experiences of other housing authorities in the region. The group is seeking initial funding for the detailed study needed to seek grants and other assistance. Close coordination with the town and the comprehensive plan update process will be essential.
- **Housing affordability:** Numerous participants expressed concern about the high cost of developing in Milliken (relative to other communities in the region) and the challenges this poses with respect to housing affordability. See infrastructure and services discussion below for more information.
- **Continue partnership with the Loveland Housing Authority:** The Loveland Housing Authority has provided Milliken’s housing authority with valuable technical assistance for considering future housing projects in and around Milliken. The housing board will be working diligently over the coming months to develop a viable

plan prior to asking for additional assistance (technical or financial) from the Loveland Housing Authority. The plan will identify programs and projects needed to meet Milliken’s diverse housing demand.

## Infrastructure and Services

- **Water supply and affordability:** Ensuring the town has access to sufficient and affordable water supply is a key concern for the community. Currently, the town relies upon two external parties to service its existing taps with treated water—the City of Greeley and the Central Weld County Water District. Although the town has a Reverse Osmosis system that was built to handle a portion of the town’s treatment needs, the system is currently off-line due to issues related to high selenium concentration levels in the water that was being discharged to the South Platte River. While the town’s current arrangement is sufficient to meet existing needs, some participants expressed concern that raw water fees and tap fees may no longer be competitive with those found in neighboring communities. Many stakeholders expressed concern that this issue was driving housing prices out of reach of entry-level home buyers and was potentially deterring potential homebuilders from considering Milliken altogether.
- **Infrastructure location/timing:** Infrastructure is not currently available to serve some parts of the town’s urban growth area. This lack of availability, coupled with an uncertainty regarding the timing of infrastructure in areas currently being planned for future development only compounds challenges related to water supply and affordability. Infrastructure has been an ongoing focus for the Town Board and will be a central part of a goal-setting session to be held in July or August of 2015.

## Parks and Recreation

- **Access to facilities and services:** Numerous stakeholders noted that Milliken’s parks function not just as recreational amenities, but also play an important role as informal community gathering places. As such, it was noted that some pockets of neighborhoods north of downtown are underserved and are not well-connected to the numerous parks south of downtown. Cost was also cited as an accessibility issue for lower-income residents who may not be able to afford fees for swimming or other facilities. The Thompson River Parks and Recreation District is currently building a new Fieldhouse just east of Settlers Village that will host a variety of recreation programs (indoor and outdoor) and provide some flexible community space. While the Fieldhouse will help fill a need for the community and increase access to services for all residents of the District, it was noted that completing trail connections from downtown neighborhoods to the Fieldhouse will be essential to ensure children may safely walk or bike there. Town parks staff noted that these connections are a focus and will be further clarified as part of a trail “gap” analysis to be completed in March 2015.
- **“Complete” park concept:** In terms of the number of parks and acreage of parks in the community, Milliken is well-served for a community its size; however, numerous stakeholders commented that improvements to many existing parks are needed to bring them up to modern standards in terms of the facilities they offer and address deferred maintenance considerations. Town parks staff noted that the community had indicated a preference for completing necessary improvements to existing parks before building new ones and that the Town Board has reinforced this focus. Existing parks have been evaluated as a means to identify necessary improvements and focus available resources where they will provide the greatest benefit.
- **Trail connectivity:** Numerous trail improvements have been made in Milliken over the past decade; however, trails are not as well connected as they could be, forcing users in many locations to walk or bicycle on busy streets. Two high priority projects are currently under construction: 1) Milliken/Johnstown trail along the CR 46 ½ alignment (Milliken portion); and 2) Broad Street sidewalk/windmill gateway. The Milliken/Johnstown trail is in the Top 5 for the Thompson Rivers Parks and Recreation (TRPR) district trails. In addition, the town recently received a grant to fund a trail gap analysis. The project, anticipated to be completed in March 2015, will help inform connections to the river and other parts of the community (e.g., the Fieldhouse currently under construction and schools). This effort will help identify critical connections to help ensure pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages can travel safely throughout Milliken without a car. The district’s plan is to use the gap analysis to inform needs, prepare shovel-ready designs, and pursue grants for construction of those

projects. The TRPR District is also working with Weld County and others on a regional trail connection to Firestone from Milliken via an abandoned rail corridor (4-miles total). The TRPR district priorities for Milliken are to first provide safe railroad crossings, then connect subdivisions, and finally to focus on regional trails. The Town has been successful in getting grants through Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) and Kaiser Permanente (KP).

## Economy

- **Economic diversification:** Milliken has long functioned as a bedroom community to Greeley and other surrounding communities; however, the town has maintained a clear focus on the need to diversify both jobs and services within the community and has focused its efforts on creating a niche for industrial users that cannot be filled by surrounding communities (See also, Growth and Development). Residents continue to emphasize the need for a broader range of retail and commercial services—particularly a grocery store. There are several stakeholders that believe in general that the east side of town gets ignored. Although some newer activity has taken place on the east side, the physical barriers (highway and fields) and distance from downtown separate the east side from the rest of Milliken.
- **Oil and gas revenue:** Currently, 54 percent of the town’s property tax revenue is based on oil and gas property. Several stakeholders expressed concern about the need to identify alternative sources of revenue in light of continued fluctuation and cutbacks in the Oil and Gas Industry.
- **Other initiatives:** Industrial hemp and marijuana dispensaries have been discussed previously as possible ways to promote continued diversification of the town’s revenue stream. While community sentiment is mixed, town residents will vote on whether or not to support marijuana dispensaries within town limits. In anticipation of this possibility, the town adopted development regulations specific to this use.
- **Downtown revitalization:** Efforts to revitalize downtown continue and some improvements are underway based on the Downtown Design Guidelines that were adopted in January 2014 (e.g., Windmill Gateway on the west edge of town); however, many participants were unaware of the recommendations and did not feel there was a clear ambassador to help carry them forward. Key initiatives include pedestrian and landscape enhancements to promote a more cohesive feel and make downtown a safer more inviting place to walk and the recently completed windmill gateway on the west edge of town. We heard from some stakeholders that the façade improvement standards aimed at protecting the character of downtown Milliken were so strict that they could be considered a disincentive to reinvestment. It was also suggested that a coordinated signage program could also help Milliken brand its downtown while directing visitors to the various parks and public spaces “off of Broad.”
- **Parking:** The downtown parking requirements cannot be met by small businesses and are particularly challenging when it comes to the adaptive reuse of existing buildings; there is a desire to consider a public parking lot in the downtown area.

## Multimodal Transportation

- **Transportation Plan:** The Town has applied for a grant to update the Transportation Plan. The focus of transportation improvements recently has been on flood recovery – replacing damaged bridges, etc.
- **East/west linkages and regional connections:** The railroad and the river are major barriers to east-west travel through Milliken. There are opportunities to work with CDOT, the North Front Range MPO, and Weld County to improve regional mobility corridors such as SH 60, SH 257, and Two Rivers Parkway.
- **Traffic volumes/safety:** Traffic volumes along SH 60 (through downtown and connecting to US 85) are an ongoing concern for the community. Numerous participants noted that large truck traffic in particular had increased over the past five years. Many of these trucks serve oil and gas fields surrounding the community. Frequent traffic backups associated with the town’s railroad crossings (at SH 60, SH 257, and Alice Avenue) were also cited as a challenge—limiting cross-town circulation and access to downtown, and creating safety

concerns for pedestrians. Additionally, the amount of train traffic has increased substantially in recent years, exacerbating congestion and increasing delays for commuters.

- **Public transportation/senior services:** There is a desire for residents to be able to live in Milliken without owning a car (many already do) and have convenient access to doctors appointments, shopping, etc., using public transportation.
- **Pedestrian/bicycle connectivity:** Improving pedestrian/linkages between community destinations. See Parks and Recreation section above for more detailed discussion.

## Desired Outcomes for Comprehensive Plan Update

- **Focus on outcomes:** Several stakeholders noted that the current plan is “too vague to be helpful” and indicated that a key focus for the plan update should be on identifying a clear path to move the community forward, adding specificity where appropriate and connecting the dots between the comprehensive plan and the many other plans and studies completed by the town over the past 2 or 3 years.
- **Linkages to Capital Improvement Plan:** Several interview participants noted the need for a closer linkage between the town’s comprehensive plan and its capital improvement program. It was noted that steps taken by the Town over the past year to dedicate resources to parks and recreation improvements was a positive step that should be continued. Future growth and development should be directly tied to available infrastructure for water, sewer, and transportation. Additional discussion will be needed to determine how this is handled currently.
- **Role of the 2003 Parks, Trails, and Recreation Plan:** Town staff indicated that the 2003 Parks plan is in need of updating and that foundational components of the plan (e.g., definition of park facility types) could be folded in to the comprehensive plan as a means to emphasize the important relationship between land use, transportation, and recreational aspects of the plan. It was noted that the Skate Park was the only project in the 2003 Parks plan that had been completed. The Comprehensive Plan update could reflect the priorities outlined in the BOOST recommendations until the town is ready to update the 2003 Parks, Trails, and Recreation Plan.
- **Linkages to future Transportation Plan update:** The town’s last transportation plan update was completed in 2008. A key goal for the updated comprehensive plan is to provide a strong policy foundation on which a subsequent update to the transportation plan can be based.