

# Boulder County planning panel gives nod to Niwot development code changes

## Tweaks draw praise, criticism from community; now advance to March 12 consideration by commissioners

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The Boulder County Planning Commission unanimously voted Wednesday night to recommend most of the changes proposed for county code provisions applying to development or redevelopment of downtown Niwot-area properties.

Some of the land use code revisions, which next will be considered by county commissioners, have drawn fire from businesses and property owners in a largely commercial area of the unincorporated community — an area that generally lies on either side of Niwot's Second Avenue, running from the block alongside Murray Street on the northwest to Niwot Road on the southeast.

Proposed restrictions on the scale and bulk of development, and the floor areas and lot coverage that could be built, continued to spark objections from some businesspeople who spoke Wednesday at the planning panel's public hearing.

"We need more square footage" of commercial space, not less, so that existing and future businesses can thrive and survive, said landlord Cotton Burden.

Artist and Camelia Court resident Michelle Henzel said, "I want Niwot to be a vibrant community district. I want Second Avenue to thrive."

Henzel said most Niwot residents she knows "do not want unreasonable limits placed upon the commercial district."

She said restrictions on the scale, location and bulk of development proposed for the downtown commercial area within the Niwot Rural Community District "will hurt us for years."

Catherine McHale, a Dry Creek Court resident and part-time economic development director for the Niwot Business Association, said people like to dine and shop in downtown Niwot rather than drive to Boulder or Longmont.

Restaurants and retail shops are essential parts of what she called the community's "ecosystem," she said, adding some of the proposed code changes would potentially kill that ecosystem.

Planning commissioners, however, also heard from residents whose homes neighbor the commercial downtown area who expressed support for at least some of the county staff-proposed code changes.

Dave Snow, a Third Avenue resident, applauded the idea of stricter height restrictions on the parts of downtown buildings set back from the alley between Second and Third avenues.

However, Snow and some other residents expressed concerns about a provision in the proposed changed that could possibly shift of some vehicular traffic from Second Avenue into the alley, which they said could result in more traffic in the alley between Second Avenue and their homes.

Snow said he did not want "to effectively put a street into our backyards."

Planning commissioners did make some revisions to the Land Use Department staff's draft of the proposed code changes, such as suggesting that ways be found to provide incentives for the development of retail business space and restaurants, putting a priority on that over development of office space or rental housing units.

County commissioners on March 12 are scheduled to consider the staff's proposals and the planning panel's recommendation.

A development moratorium is in place in the Niwot Rural Community District until March 20. Commissioners enacted the moratorium in September and renewed it in October to allow staff time to develop the proposed code changes.

In advance of commissioners' initial vote to place a hold on accepting, processing or approving development applications in the district, Nicole Wobus, the Land Use Department's long range planning manager, said, "It just became apparent that this was the right time to do this."

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