

September 20, 2021



Steven Olivas, Chair and Planning Commissioners
City of Pasadena
VIA EMAIL: htam@cityofpasadena.net

Re: Draft East Colorado Specific Plan

Dear Chari Olivas and Planning Commissioners.

Thank you for your service to Pasadena. It is much appreciated.

The Board of Directors of the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce is aware you will be reviewing the draft East Colorado Specific Plan. This plan area, which is relatively small stretching only from Wilson Avenue on the west to Roosevelt Avenue on the east, is crucial to Pasadena, both our history and our future.

This area of Colorado Boulevard has been a historically significant part of Pasadena since before the designation of Route 66 in 1926. The area still has significant architectural resources from that era, including car dealerships and other buildings. The Main Street of America has also been the Main Street of Pasadena.

While we appreciate the work and effort put into the draft, we would ask that it be held and referred back to staff.

Specifically, we are concerned about the prohibition on drive-thru uses and the designation of existing drive-thru uses as non-conforming. Our concerns center on three issues:

1. Making existing drive-thru uses non-conforming, while not immediately having and impact, may lead to more stringent restrictions in the future.
2. Making any new drive-thru uses in the area illegal may further impact the economic vitality of the area and is antithetical to the history and established use of the area.
3. There is no allowance for those who may already be in the approval process with the City of Pasadena to continue with their application to completion. They are not grandfathered into the process as has so often been done in the past.
4. Property owners along the area are unaware of the plan update or the proposal to ban drive-thru uses.

While the current plan allows existing drive-thru businesses that will be designated non-conforming to upgrade, expand or alter their properties, this may not always be the case. Even with the language as it exists in the proposal, property owners may be reluctant to do improvements to properties that are officially non-conforming. We do not want to see deterioration of existing drive-thru uses because property owners fear investing in a use that is non-conforming. Maintaining the drive-thru as allowed with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) will have a much more positive effect into the future than banning that use altogether.

East Colorado Boulevard has historically been an automobile-oriented street. Since the early days of Pasadena through the Route 66 era and into today, the boulevard has been home to motels/motor inns,

restaurants, take-out food operations, auto repair shops and car dealerships. Roadside food stands once proliferated along Colorado Boulevard, a use that has been supplanted by drive-thru food operations. Continuing the drive through allowance maintains the historic context of Colorado Boulevard. Keeping the CUP requirements protects the area from overconcentration, poorly designed properties and uses (such as drive-thru liquor stores) that may not be desirable anywhere in Pasadena. We can maintain high standards and allow for drive-thru uses.

Typically, at least in my experience, when we do make significant changes to a land use anyone who has applications before the city is allowed to continue through the process to completion. In allowing existing drive-thru uses to be non-conforming but able to modify, upgrade or expand their facilities does the same for those already operating. It is only fair that property owners and tenants with applications already in the "pipeline" be allowed to continue. They have already made a significant investment and should not be penalized because of a small --- of timing.

The property owners and businesses I spoke with about the process and update to the East Colorado Specific Plan were unaware that it is happening and completely unaware of the impacts it could have on their property. While I am sure staff did as good a job as possible notifying property owners of the process, the constraints placed upon everyone as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic made it nearly impossible to properly notify those with the most at stake, the property owners.

Finally, while it is important that we reduce auto uses as much as possible and the resultant greenhouse gas emissions, the reality remains that the vast majority of trips in Pasadena are by car. Given the historic nature of Colorado Boulevard as an auto oriented street, and the current uses, which are clearly auto-oriented, it makes sense to consider maintaining the boulevard as a place to appropriately locate drive-thru uses, along with the current businesses that cater to those driving cars. Even Pasadena City College is a majority commuter school with students driving to campus from communities throughout our region. Perhaps we should acknowledge that some streets are simply suited for auto-oriented uses and drive-thrus.

The pandemic has also changed people's dining behaviors so that curbside pick up and drive-thru are much more necessary to Pasadenans wanting to patronize out local restaurants while keeping themselves safe. By not allowing some drive-thru uses, with Conditional Use Permits, to build along the East Colorado Specific Plan area, we will likely find those same establishments offering curbside service which will snarl traffic, create other impacts and become a detriment to the area and a headache for neighbors in the area.

Please send this proposal back to staff for reconsideration and to do more outreach to property owners and businesses along the impacted area of Colorado Boulevard who will be most effected.

Thank you,



Paul Little
President and Chief Executive Officer

Cc: D. Reyes, City Council