

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION + PROCESS



Adams County and the City of Brighton partnered to create the District Plan to study the feasibility of preserving farmland in southern Brighton that remains valuable for food production, while allowing for a range of development opportunities that consider the most efficient and sustainable use of the land.

This area has been a priority for farmland preservation for several years, and residents of both the County and City have emphasized that maintaining its farming heritage is important to the area’s character. Nevertheless, several farmers want to sell their land for various reasons – there is no heir to take over the farm, they need to fund their retirement, and / or encroaching development and traffic congestion are making it increasingly difficult to grow crops in the area. Development pressure over the years has already resulted in the loss of farmland, breaking what remains into smaller, less contiguous areas. The Adams County Comprehensive Plan and Brighton’s Comprehensive Plan, currently being updated, have identified goals for preserving area farms as described on pages 4 and 5, thus necessitating this in-depth study to craft a unified vision and action plan for the area that provides landowners with development and conservation options.

Created with area landowners, farmers, developers, City and County leaders, and the general public, the District Plan addresses the area’s future food economy, land use, transportation, open space, parks, natural resource conservation, recreation, water rights, historic and cultural preservation, and capital improvements. This plan helps decision-makers guide investment in the area for compatible residential, commercial, and industrial development, as well as farmland conservation, and local food and agritourism promotion.

KEYS TO PLAN SUCCESS

- Balanced land development options*
- Realistic implementation techniques*
- Comfort level with process and plan*
- Broad public participation during plan creation*

PLAN CHALLENGES

- Differing motivations of stakeholders*
- Joint County and City approval*
- Property owners’ and neighbors’ perceptions*
- Evolving farming practices*
- Education & communication*

PLAN OPPORTUNITIES

- Unique identity for City and County*
- Regional, possibly national, economic and tourist draw*
- Unique model for balancing development and agriculture*
- Consistency between City and County*

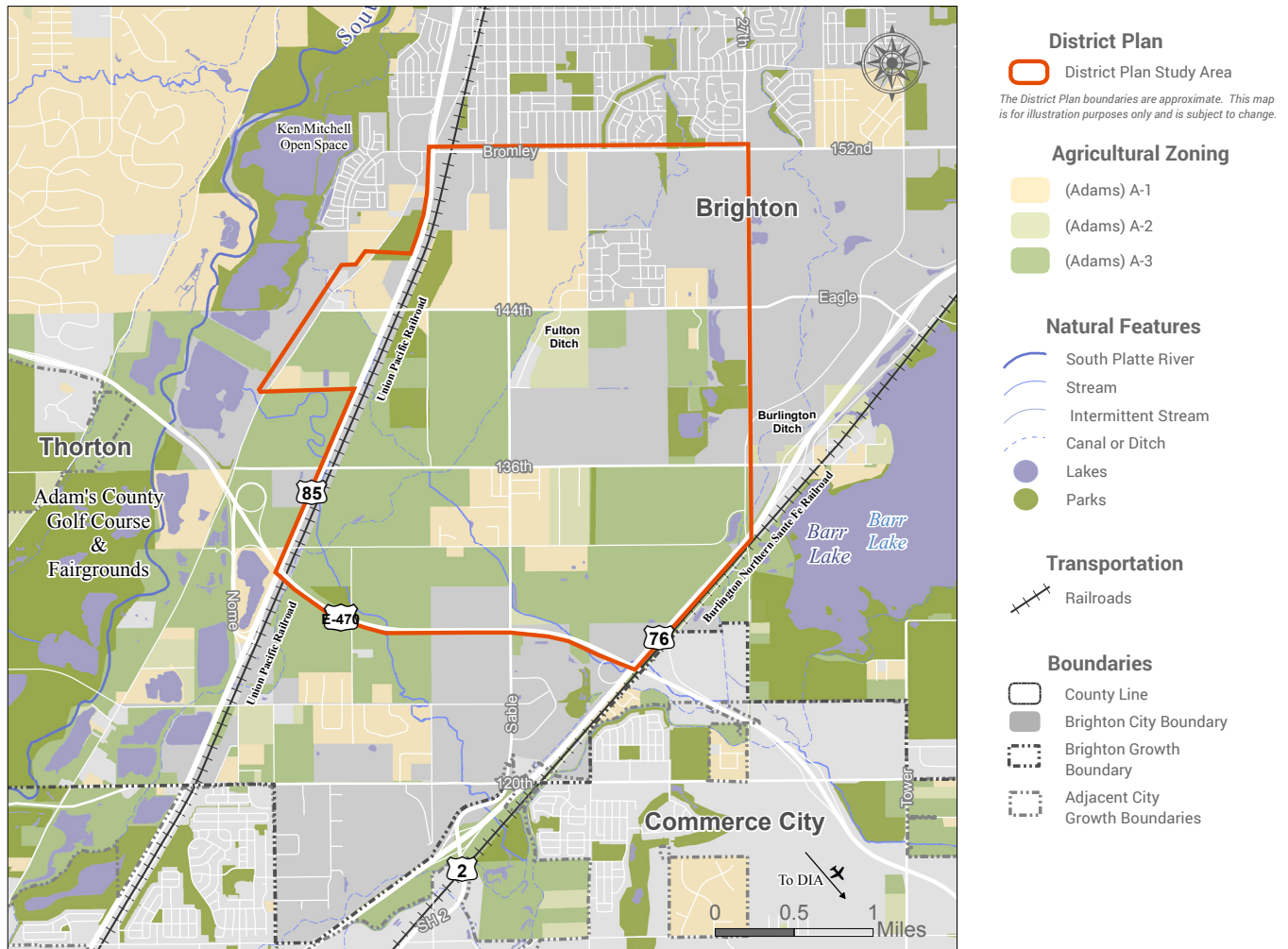
STUDY AREA

Encompassing approximately 5,000 acres northeast of the Denver metro area, the District study area lies in a fertile pocket of soil that has been farmed for centuries, and where many farms continue to operate. The area includes historic farmsteads, land cultivated by two of the largest vegetable growers and one of the largest nursery growers in the state, multiple farmstands, and Berry Patch Farm, a you-pick-it destination and community-supported agricultural operation.

Almost two-thirds of the study area is within the rural Adams County, with the remainder in Brighton, a fast-growing community of 36,000 residents with pressure to develop southward. The District Plan area serves as a gateway between Denver and the northeastern plains, and provides excellent regional access by three highways (US 85, E-470, and I-76), and two major railroads, and is 15 minutes from the Denver International Airport (DIA).

“No other town in Colorado has four farm markets and is home to the two largest vegetable farm growers in the state.”

-Tim Ferrell, Berry Patch Farm



DISTRICT VISION

The District has been in a state of transition since E-470 opened in 2003, making the area more accessible and developable, threatening its farming heritage, the local food economy, and the buffer that farmland provides between Brighton and the Denver region. Although some development is desirable, thoughtful and proactive coordination are necessary to ensure the South Platte River’s prime farmland will remain a southern gateway to Brighton, balancing a mix of neighborhoods with small and medium-sized farms. Rural uses, such as farming, food processing, and clustered housing on 1-3 acre lots, will be focused in the County. Urban uses, such as multifamily, mixed use, and neighborhood commercial developments, will be encouraged in the City.

The Fulton Ditch trail network will tie destinations together – farm stands, farm-to-table restaurants, pick-your-own farms, a historic farm and special events venue, bed and breakfasts, working lands, and food storage and processing facilities – from the South Platte River to Barr Lake. Properly developed and preserved, the District will retain its status as a hub of local foods, enhance the local food economy, become a tourist destination for food connoisseurs, and promote the distinctive image of a freestanding community that grows a significant portion of the region’s produce. This vision is supported by several County and City plans completed in recent years, as described on the following pages.

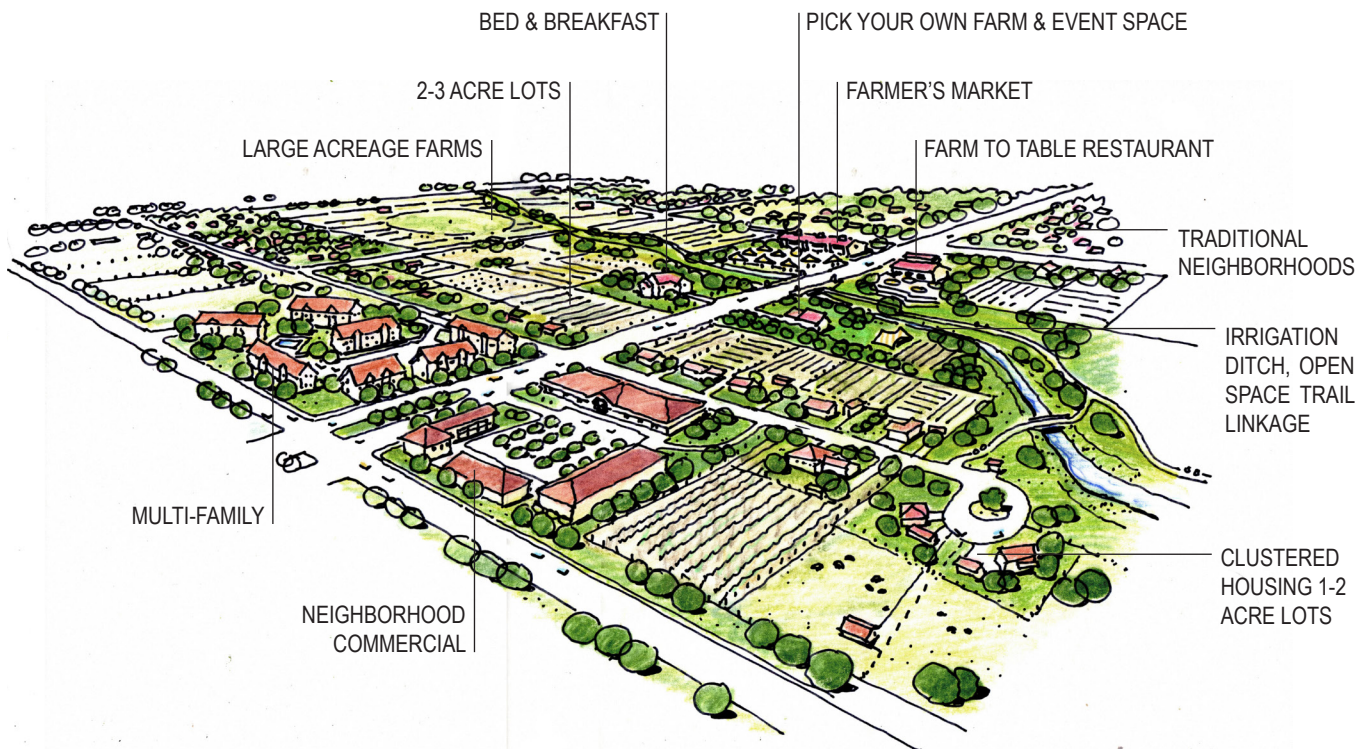
GUIDING VALUES OF THE STUDY

Advance Brighton & Adams County’s agricultural heritage

Respect private property & landowners

Ensure transparency

Protect the rural landscape



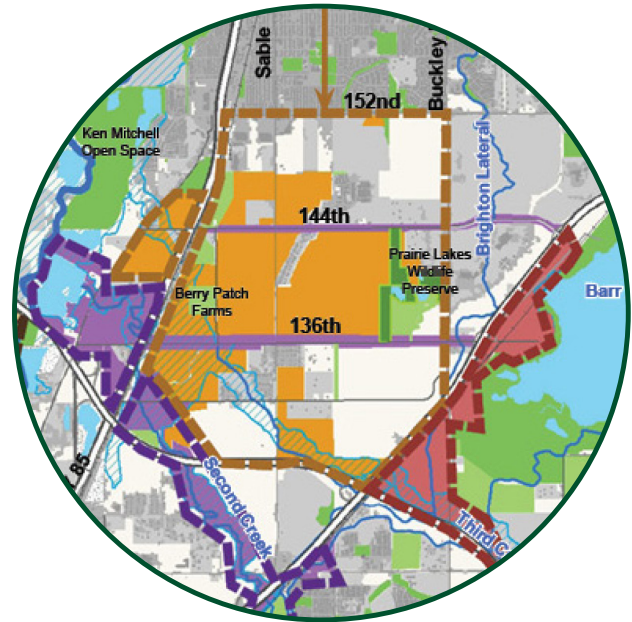
This sketch doesn’t represent any particular location in the District, but rather provides an orientation of how development may appear in a desired spatial layout, and illustrates how the area could transition over time; blending boutique and commercial farms with large-lot homes, apartments, commercial development, recreation, and food destinations.

RELATED PLANS

ADAMS COUNTY PARKS, OPEN SPACE & TRAILS MASTER PLAN (2012)

The Adams County Parks, Open Space and Trails Master Plan established the creation of an Agricultural Tourism Study Area south of Brighton with a broad mix of uses intended to support the development of a thriving agricultural production area and destination for agricultural tourism. Public input helped inform and shape plan recommendations.

According to this plan, which was completed at the same time as the Adams County Comprehensive Plan, “The single best place within the Denver Metro region for cultivating, processing and distributing food that is integrated into an urban surrounding is within the County, south of Brighton. The rich agricultural lands, local specialty foods, and easy access from major highways and regional trails make this location ideal for creating a destination for residents and visitors to experience the bountiful products of the land and scenic qualities of the area.”

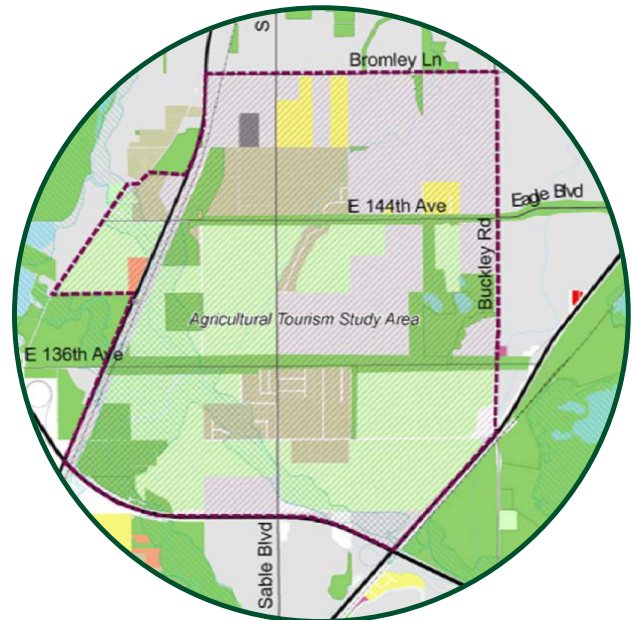


The Adams County Parks, Open Space & Trails Master Plan identified South Brighton as the Denver region’s best place to grow, process, and distribute local foods.

IMAGINE ADAMS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2012)

The Adams County Comprehensive Plan identifies this area as an Agricultural Tourism Study Area and reinforces the concept of local food production and tourism. Such uses are envisioned to include, but would not be limited to: working farms, bed and breakfasts, farm stay and tour operations, farmers markets or farmstands, agricultural processing facilities, and clustered, sustainably designed residential developments that focus on backyard and neighborhood or community farms.

The plan contemplates recent infrastructure development, existing entitlements, and the recommendations of the City of Brighton’s South Sub-Area Plan; and envisions a codeveloped and adopted agritourism centered-plan. It also recommended a subarea planning effort in partnership with the City of Brighton and other stakeholders to explore the full range of opportunities that exist within the study area. The District Plan fulfills this intent.

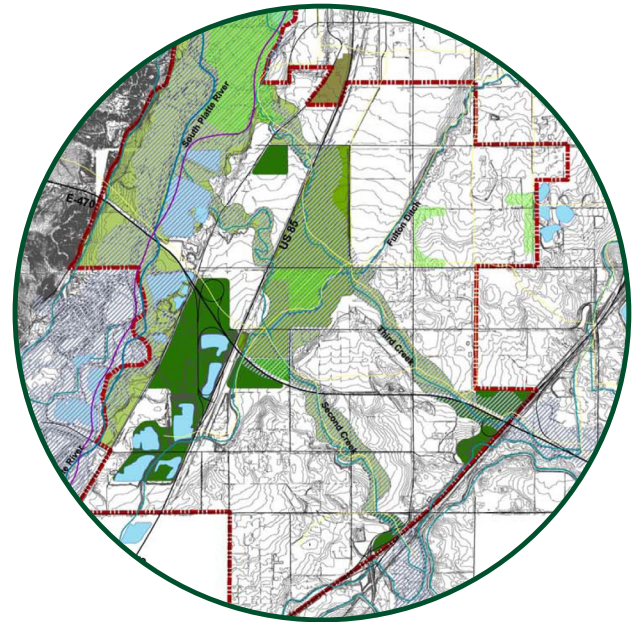


The Adams County Comprehensive Plan reinforced the boundary of an agritourism district that could attract visitors and enhance the local food economy.

BRIGHTON SOUTH SUB-AREA PLAN (2005)

The South Sub-Area Plan was developed as a companion document to Brighton’s 1999 Comprehensive Plan. After the construction of E-470, Brighton anticipated significant residential, commercial, and industrial growth southward, and subsequently extended water and sewer lines to the area. Nevertheless, the plan recognized the importance of preserving historically prime agricultural lands in the area, and due to the economic downturn and other trends, this area remains largely agricultural.

The District Plan represents an update of the vision and goals for this subarea. The conservation and development strategies recommended as part of this District Plan will supersede the South Sub-Area Plan and be integrated into the City’s comprehensive plan update mentioned below.

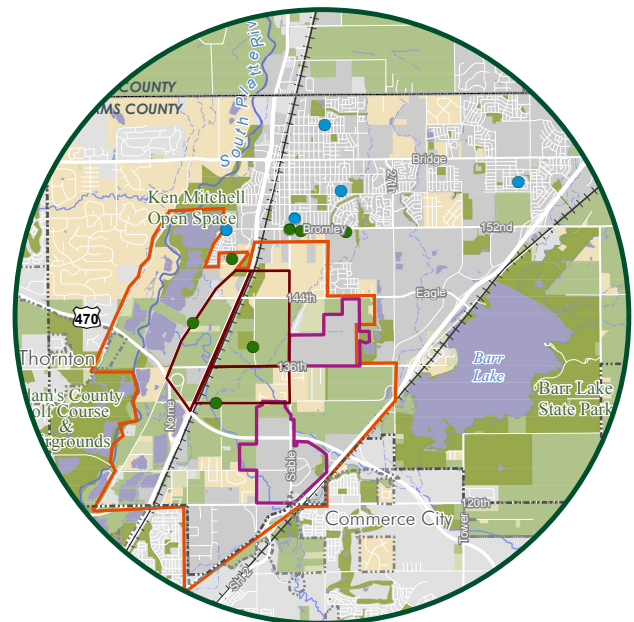


For 10+ years, the South Sub-Area Plan has targeted environmentally sensitive lands in the study area, including the floodplain, for open space and agriculture.

BE BRIGHTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN & TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATES (2016)

Concurrent with the District Plan, the City of Brighton is updating its Comprehensive Plan (originally adopted in 1999 and last amended in 2009) and Transportation Master Plan (originally adopted in 2002). With input from the public and advisory committees, the new Comprehensive Plan will guide the entire City’s future growth and development for the next 20 years. These plans are identifying and fulfilling the future vision for Brighton and aligning City policies with current trends and values.

One of four major themes in the Comprehensive Plan update includes “A Future Rooted & Growing in a Farming Heritage & Small Town Feel,” focused on maintaining and enhancing the City’s agricultural assets. The results of a public survey indicated widespread support for preserving farmland, agritourism, scenic gateways, and cultural resources. In recent years, the Brighton Economic Development Corporation launched a new branding effort, “It All Grows in Brighton,” which highlights the City’s past and future rooted in a rich agricultural history.



Be Brighton Comprehensive Plan analysis confirmed community support for a concentration of agricultural assets in the District Plan study area threatened by encroaching development.

PUBLIC PROCESS + SCHEDULE

The County and City conducted neighborhood meetings in June and July of 2015 to gain an initial understanding of area issues and opportunities prior to approval of an intergovernmental agreement to fund this plan. Over 250 people attended the June and July meetings. In September, the County and City hired a consultant team that led the plan through an 8-month public outreach and approvals process.

To encourage public participation throughout plan development, the County and City managed a project website, posted five informational videos, mailed 1,600 postcards, inserted notices into utility bills, ran newspaper ads, and provided Spanish translation.

In October, the consultant team personally interviewed several area stakeholders and held the first of three meetings with working groups, consisting of landowners, farmers, developers, area residents, and County and City staff. These meetings allowed for a thorough vetting of area conditions and interests, provided for one-on-one conversations with those most

affected by the plan, and helped shape the dialogue of future neighborhood meetings. The project team also met individually with property owners on three separate occasions throughout the planning process.

County and City staff and their consultants held five neighborhood meetings in five months to present area strengths and weaknesses, a market study about the local food economy, water rights information, and case studies. These meetings allowed concerned citizens to voice their preferences for farmland conservation and various development options. Several hundred people participated over the course of all public meetings.

Throughout the process, study sessions with County and City Planning Commissioners, Brighton City Council Members, and the Board of County Commissioners offered additional insight into community values. This plan considers the aspirations of everyone who participated and attempts to balance the livelihoods of all who are affected, by encouraging a thoughtful transition of the area.

	SEP 2015	OCT 2015	NOV 2015	DEC 2015
TASKS	PROJECT INITIATION	EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS & MARKET STUDY		OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS & ALTERNATIVES
STAKEHOLDERS + WORKING GROUPS	Working Groups Workshop 10/19	Stakeholder Interviews	Ag Land Preservation Subcommittee 11/4	Working Groups Workshop 11/9 Working Groups Workshop 12/7
GENERAL PUBLIC		Neighborhood Meeting #1 10/26	Neighborhood Meeting #2 11/16	Neighborhood Meeting #3 12/14
ADAMS COUNTY LEADERSHIP		Planning Commission Study Session 10/22	Board of County Commissioners Study Session 10/27	Planning Commission Study Session 12/10 Board of County Commissioners Study Session 12/15
CITY OF BRIGHTON LEADERSHIP		City Council Update 10/13	Planning Commission & City Council Study Session 11/10	Planning Commission & City Council Study Session 12/8

SPANISH TRANSLATION & OUTREACH

Development of the District Plan emphasized inclusive outreach and participation, including Spanish-speaking stakeholders and residents. Postcards, meeting posters, and website content were provided in Spanish, and consultant Hispanidad placed 500 fliers and 200 posters in key locations, including churches, schools, community spaces, and businesses. Hispanidad also reached out to established community networks including non-profit advocacy groups. Radio advertisements and interviews were had with Spanish media, and an informational phone line was set up. Dual translation was provided at neighborhood and public hearing meetings, and resident, stakeholders, and referral agencies were asked to comment on the plan in a bilingual letter.



Three workshops with Working Groups allowed area stakeholders and County and City staff to discuss District opportunities and constraints in depth.

JAN 2016		FEB 2016		MAR 2016		APR 2016	
DRAFT PLAN & RECOMMENDATIONS				FINAL PLAN REVIEW & ADOPTION			
One-on-One Meetings with Property Owners 1/12 & 1/13		Ag Land Preservation Subcommittee 1/13		Ag Land Preservation Subcommittee 2/29			
		Neighborhood Meeting #4 2/22		Neighborhood Meeting #5 2/29			
Board of County Commissioners Study Session 1/5		Planning Commission Study Session 2/11		Board of County Commissioners Study Session 3/8		Planning Commission Hearing 3/24	
Planning Commission & City Council Study Session 1/26		Planning Commission & City Council Study Session 2/23		Planning Commission Study Session 3/8		Planning Commission Hearing & City Council Study Session 3/22	
						Board of County Commissioners Hearing 4/5	
						City Council Hearing 4/5	

PUBLIC INPUT RESULTS

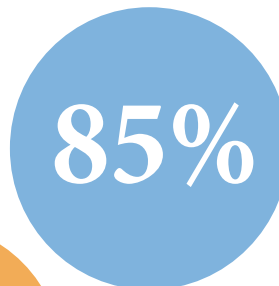
As part of the Be Brighton comprehensive plan update, 95 individuals from Brighton and unincorporated Adams County took a survey to help prioritize future land use opportunities throughout the City’s Growth Management Area (see Appendix B). Several questions assessed public support for the proper balance between urban expansion and agricultural uses. The colored circles below summarize the findings from the online survey for those that selected “support” or “strongly support.” The word cloud at the bottom of the page summarizes the common words we heard from the public during the District Plan development process. Additional public input that helped to determine plan objectives came from the 2014 Adams County Quality of Life Survey, which identified open space, parks, and trails as high-priority services.

“Open spaces are important to provide for. I really enjoy the farms surrounding us. They are disappearing too fast.”

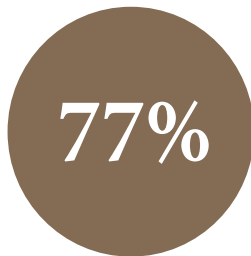
-Adams County Quality of Life Survey Respondent



Support Produce Stands & Agritourism



Continue to Encourage Prime Farmland Preservation & Retain Major Growers



Activate the Bromley Hishinuma Farm



Retain Lands East of I-76 as Rural and Recreational



Continue to Preserve Historic Resources

