

Ladies and Gentlemen of the El Paso County Planning Commission

May 25, 2020

This is being sent to you, PCD, HLA and the BoCC as a final plea asking the May 26, 2021 Planning Commissioners to own this Master Plan which they are tasked by Statute to “create and adopt”.

The Plan to date has been created by EPC PCD Directors, Staff and HLA (the Consultant) and with consultation with the MPAC and somewhat by County Departments and partner agencies. Although four Planning Commissioners also serve on the MPAC, the Planning Commission *as a Body* has had little to do with the Creation of the April 23rd draft Master Plan, which the public could not access in its entirety online until April 28. No Public Workshops were ever held.

I am asking the Planning Commissioners to accept the draft presented with additions corrections on May 26, 2021 as a recommended draft and to hold their own public Workshops, and other interactive public discussions with all Stakeholders, including the Public, County Department Heads and Agency partners to become fully informed about strengths and weaknesses of this plan over the next few months before adopting it.

This plan needs to be the best it can be. It is imperative that this plan is crafted to be truly useful and reflect the broad spectrum of physical, social, and economic diversity in El Paso County.

You have the power to direct this on May 26, 2021.

This plan, as passed to you from MPAC following its April 14, 2021 final meeting (without a formal motion or posted minutes) appears to me to still be a preliminary draft lacking basic parallel and hierarchical organization, editing, sufficient Tables of Contents, Maps, Photos and Figures (none of these are numbered and many maps and photos lack North arrows, scale and useful labels). Citations of data sources, links to pertinent El Paso County subdocuments, and related documents of other agencies are missing.

I have seen no plans to release this document to the public in a format that is easily downloadable, and affordably printable. As it stands now “Your El Paso” has a huge amount of wasted “white space” and inefficient use of both megabytes and white space with unnecessarily large and questionable 3-D graphics, complicated fonts and inconsistent format.

There are no appendices, and indeed some of the length of chapters, including the Implementation chapter, could be mitigated by putting material (like sources of funding or other updatable or boilerplate items) into appendices.

PlanCOS, the January, 2020 Master Plan for Colorado Springs is a similar high-level Master Plan - but anyone can go down to the City Printing Center and purchase a full copy in 8 1/2 x

11 format, with foldout maps, punched, and in a three ring binder for \$30.00.

It is also downloadable and pages can be printed on standard equipment. This plan contains a general template for the City’s growth, but it does not force one-size-fits-all and it allows Neighborhoods (comparable to the County’s former “Small Areas” to take initiative and build their communities within the Master Plan overall framework. This lacking in *Your El Paso*.

I was told a few days ago then I asked PCD for a WORD version of the implementation Chapter so I could do a Stepwise Analysis of the myriad of over 300 Specific Strategies (and additional Goals and Objective within the Core Principles) to examine if there were duplicates, redundancies or misplaced items, that there was no Word Version.

Here is what the RFP from summer of 2018 says:

RFP 18-111

“All work products are to be provided to the County in “usable and editable/writable” formats, The Contractor shall use MS Word (either 10 or 11 Arial or Calibri font size) and MS Excel (all Microsoft Office 2013), IBM PC compatible graphics packages to generate text, figures, tables, and drawings as needed. The Contractor shall obtain approval from the County of all graphics and other software proposed for use under this contract. All final deliverables shall be provided on CD and flash drive. All deliverables shall be clearly organized and indexed for easy access and retrieval. 50 printed copies of the plan shall be provided after any approval action by the Planning Commission.” (pages 10 and 11).

Why is there no Word Version?

Everything provided to the Public, and apparently to MPAC (as observed by me) since 2019, was hardcopy - large format, landscape orientation, double sided - or online on the HLA ARCGIS-HUB. This format strongly constrained public participation and I think it made it difficult for the MPAC members to review.

Per the published Video Article “Geodesign at All Scales” April 19, 2019 on the HLA <website at: (<https://www.esri.com/videos/watch?videoid=rEZB4OJEZdw>)>

Devin Lavigne explains how using the ARCIS HUB planned for public outreach for the El Paso County Master Plan would be an experimental effort that would be beta tested for its effectiveness in reaching over 700,000 people in a 2100 square mile very large planning area.

Bear in mind that this video was made a month *before* the Local Outreach In Person Meetings for “You El Paso” began in mid-May of 2019, and before Covid 19 struck nine months later.

From the beginning the ARCGIS -HUB was problematic - with County IT, and for citizens to use for Map Social. Update regular, It required an ARCGIS password, which I argued (for months) should *never* be required for a public plan outreach website that should be easily accessible to all users. The public participation level for Map Social especially remained low throughout the entire process. I was never able to read the full plan until March 9, 2021.

Was there ever any beta testing of the success of this ARCGIS-HUB approach? I doubt it.

HLA prides itself on High Tech Urban Planning with a wide range of cutting edge computer programs. Perhaps their 3-D Graphics and the scale of their analyses fits urban landscapes - but it does not appear to be a good fit with El Paso County.

The chosen format of double-sided color landscape orientation, large format, small fonts, and large files became especially problematic after release of the plan for Public Review on March 9, 2021 when it was required that the public download a 600 MB+ file in a County where there was little to no broadband service.

During the sporadic times of MPAC meetings after January 2020, and the “Prescribed Process” (ginned up in April of 2019 and which at least had some public meetings although they were “optional”) then Covid made it impossible to hold any In-Person meetings during 2020 and early 2021. There was no consideration of adjusting the format, file sizes, or procedures into ways that allowed or encouraged wider information dissemination or public participation, or anything truly interactive. The Local Outreach Team was arbitrarily dissolved by Mr. Dossey in early June, 2020 just as Public Outreach began, so that ended any changes of adding another layer of review and input.

I think County Department Heads and Agency partners are included in these communication difficulties also thus between January, 2020 and March of 2021, this Master Plan was mostly the product of closed PCD interaction with the Consultant and perhaps selected stakeholders.

Although Virtual MPAC and Virtual Planning Commission meetings were held, there was little real communication or discussion or effort to reach the public.

To cut to the chase, boxes have been checked off for this Master Plan Exercise, but the Planning Commission certainly did not “Create” this plan, and I think it is incumbent on the Planning Commissioners as The Responsible Body to take over the reins and direct a proper finish to the draft which has been recommended to you by PCD and the Consultant.

There are several very complex topics in this plan which are either dismissed with a wave and statement “*THAT* is covered in the xyz subplan” (2018 Water Master Plan, MTCP, Parks Plan or whatever) or you are told that this has all be “vetted” with whomever.

You have been told that the Public has had plenty of time and opportunity to provide input. In order to provide *meaningful* input anyone (whether the public, Department heads, agencies or MPAC members) *they need fully disclosed, updated information throughout the process.*

Speaking as someone who hung in there like a pit bull since this planning process began in Spring 2019, I can assure you that there was very skimpy information to respond to for input - whether it had to do with the one public visioning meeting (with no followup discussions) or the summer videos on Placetypes, Key Areas and Areas of Change.

Only a partial plan (no Implementation Chapter) was released on March 9, and the public only had five days to view a hard-to download 171 page online, large format plan - and the *two citizens* (Terry Stokka and myself) who dared speak on May 5 were allowed 10 minutes - and I was cut off before I could show my last two slides.

The attachment pages of my input with graphic and spreadsheets that I provided directly to PCD were never shown to MPAC on April 14 (only two of three cover letters) were rapidly “scrolled” why PCD members were talking, and PCD Directors and Andrea Barlow, Chair of MPAC decided to skip over my submittals completely, and rush through the rest of the public comments in the last 20 minutes of the three hour meeting. The scroll of comments from PCD cut off comments from Chapters 1 and 2.

PCD did not show the “Word Cloud ARCGIS “Summary 1,2,3” at all at the April 14, 2020 MPAC Meeting. This material, was HLA’s computer summary from comments submitted to their online Chapter -by Chapter questionnaire, but did not include any Chapters that had less than 20 comments (this was also posted on the HLA site).

This track record is simply NOT an authentic public review of this important plan.

This Master Plan does not provide cogent discussion of how to conserve of open space - it does not even include the baseline extensive work by EPC Parks on where and what to conserve - done two decades ago with the assistance and expertise of Colorado Natural Heritage Program - whose April 9, 2021 input was not shown either as part of public comments.

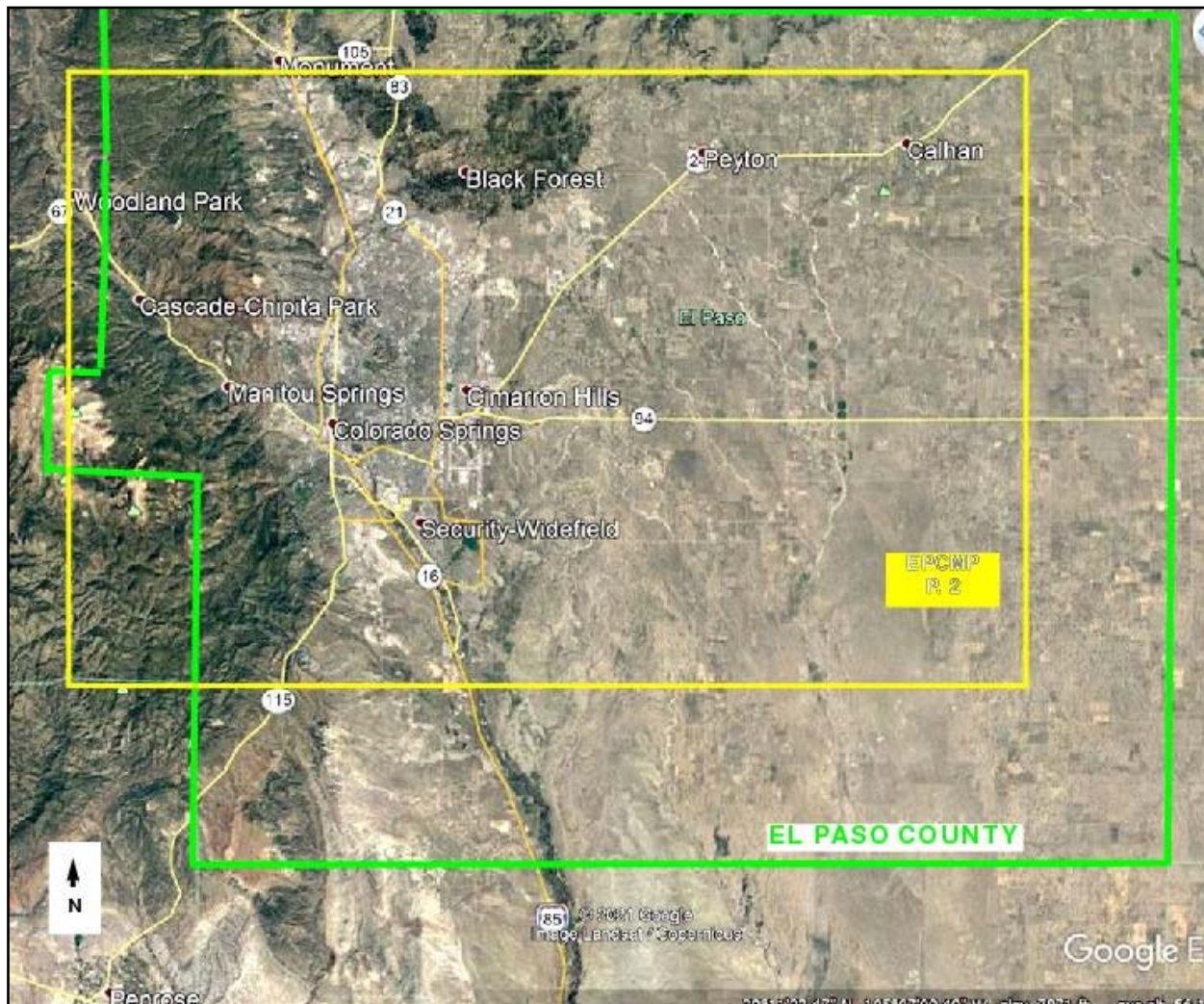
There are no specifics on cooperation with the City or other municipalities to connect open spaces, habitats and parks, effectively plan for and conserve water, solve traffic issues or provide alternative ways to allocate population numbers. Metro Districts, continued urban development in the County on mining non-sustainable Ground water, other options for unincorporated area non-municipal communities besides annexation, how much population growth could reasonably expect to be absorbed by municipalities and omitted. Data is simply missing on State Stewardship identified Trust Lands, location and acreages of in-place Conservation Easements, the role of Groundwater Management Districts in County Land Use Decision-Making, what on-going studies are happening regarding ground water level monitoring, water

quality, specifically where there are problems areas with metrics), and how to better involve citizens in government (and even allow for minority or dissenting opinions to be heard and discussed rather than to be suppressed and ignored).

There is a wealth of available information on the Natural Environment of El Paso County but none of it appears in this Master Plan - even just references, and there was no one on MPAC who had any Natural Resource Management Experience who could offer that perspective, nor was the input of the Colorado Natural Heritage Program solicited, accepted or shared..

Based on what one can read in this report the County is flat, has no history, and has never had any professional comprehensive planning. None of those is true, but I would invite you to show me otherwise in “Your ElPaso”.

On page two of the Master Plan is an unlabeled aerial photo. Below, .the yellow polygon is the approximate edges of this page 2 photo layered onto a Google Earth Photo of El Paso County from 2019 which has the County boundaries in green lines.



Google Earth base aerial photo has the roads and place labels - the page 2 aerial photo had no labels at all.

This is just one example of loosey-goosey fancy graphics with little useful information. One would at least think an aerial photo on the second of the County Master Plan page would be of the entire County - not shorted by 6, 10 or 15 miles on the north, east and south respectively, and include parts of other counties on the west!

In the past two months I have transparently copied my public comments to PCD, HLA and the BoCC. Why am I send this directly to the Planning Commissioners whose e-mails I have, copying in PCD,HLA and t;he BoCC? Because previous comments I sent were obscured or minimized - and I do not Trust the Process. In my long career related to biology and ecology - which began in this County in 1969- I have always taken the part to speak for the Environment - whether as an advocate for a County-wide Parks District in 1971, as service on its first Board as Secretary, as a founder of the Palmer Parks Foundation (now Palmer Land Conservancy), or as a U.S. Forest Service Forest Ecologist with a PhD in Landscape Ecology. I have been involved with Planning in this County, as a citizen, much of the time since 1971, and owned a published a successful award winning newspaper for 17 years (1997 - 2014).

I find it very sad and disheartening to witness what has happened with the process for this Master Plan and I hope the Planning Commissioners can take over what has been done to date and give it the time, care and refinement it needs to become a useful and consistent tool for responsible and conservation-minded Land Use change in this County

Sincerely,

Dr. Judith von Ahlefeldt,

Landscape Ecologist, Citizen



This is an HLA 3-D Graphic attempt for the Front Range. It is the primary photo in their "Leaders in Geodesign" promo on their Home Website page. Interesting how the entire Black Forest is part of Urbanized Colorado Springs, and (Oh My) how Ellicott has grown! You can sure see the land use difference between El Paso County and Douglas/Elbert Counties. Is this a prophecy?