

# **Final Project: Downtown Denver Plan Update**

## **Downtown Buildout Scenarios**

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## Section 1: Downtown Denver Overview

Downtown Denver is a vibrant mixed-use urban environment. The area primarily functions as an employment center, but is poised for significant growth in the residential market. A strong presence of retail, cultural, sports, entertainment and educational uses cater to daytime office users, Downtown residents, entertainment seekers and students. These uses combined with growing transit infrastructure provide the foundation for a healthy urban lifestyle. Approximately 110,000 people currently work Downtown. Companies dealing in finance, insurance and real estate, as well as companies providing legal and computer/telecom services employ about half of the Downtown workforce. Many of these companies are located within the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Financial District, which contains historic mid-rises as well as several high-rises, including the Republic Plaza, Denver's tallest building at 56 stories. As the dominant land use, the office market encompasses 23 million square feet that supports more than 5,000 businesses. Several government offices are also located in Downtown. The Federal District, which includes a federal courthouse, takes its place along 19<sup>th</sup> Street between California and Curtis streets. The Wellington E. Webb Municipal Office Building, a new 12-story building that houses several of Denver's government agencies, borders Civic Center Park along the southern edge of Downtown, across from the City and County Building and just two blocks from the planned Justice Center. About 5,300 hotel rooms in Downtown accommodate business users as well as tourists. The recent expansion of the Convention Center at California and 14<sup>th</sup> streets has spurred a boom in hotel developments, including the Hyatt Denver adjacent to the Convention Center. Some proposed hotels, including the Four Seasons and the Inn at the DAC, intend to provide condominiums as well as temporary accommodations, seizing the appeal of Downtown as more than just a place to work and play.

Downtown is home to about 9,000 people living in 6,239 dwelling units. Most residences are concentrated in the Lower Downtown Historic District, known as LoDo, which contains lofts, galleries, brewpubs and restaurants in restored historic buildings. LoDo also draws people to Coors Field, home to the Colorado Rockies professional baseball team. Although the residential market in Downtown has been sluggish since the 1980's, several residential developments have been recently completed and more are proposed. Downtown living appeals primarily to singles and empty nesters and residents are, on average, 41 years old. Unfortunately for many

residents, and despite a strong mix of retail uses, Downtown lacks major residential support facilities, such as grocery, hardware and department stores.

More than 400 retailers, in addition to numerous restaurants, occupy 3.5 million square feet of Downtown retail space, much of which is located along the one-mile-long 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall. The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall is a pedestrian mall that forms the main spine of Downtown, anchored by the Regional Transportation District's (RTD) Civic Center Station, at Broadway and Colfax Avenue, and the Market Street Station, at Market and 16<sup>th</sup> streets. The Mall is serviced by a free shuttle bus. Major retail nodes located along the mall include the Denver Pavilions, Tabor Center and Writer's Square. The Denver Pavilions contains 350,000 square feet occupied by national retailers, including Gap and Banana Republic, large restaurants and clubs, as well as a movie theater. Downtown Denver provides many options to entertainment and recreation seekers beyond the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall. Larimer Square, on Larimer Street between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> streets, attracts people to its trendy restaurants and boutique shops housed in historic buildings. The Denver Performing Arts Complex, located at 14<sup>th</sup> and Curtis streets, features plays, musicals and ballets. Cherry Creek, which parallels Speer Boulevard and forms the western edge of Downtown, and the South Platte River, along Downtown's northwestern edge, provide people respite from concrete and asphalt as well as recreational opportunities. Civic Center Park, Skyline Park and Commons Park also provide green space.

Despite Downtown Denver's strengths and its urban character, it has yet to achieve a truly cosmopolitan status. Much of this is owed to a need for more residents who would contribute to nighttime and weekend pedestrian activity when weekday office users are tucked away in the suburbs. With a regional commitment to significantly expand mass transit, Downtown Denver's attractiveness as a place to live is likely to increase. In addition to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall shuttle bus and the numerous bus routes serving Downtown, the expansion of light rail throughout the region and the role of Union Station as a regional transit hub will ensure that Downtown is well-connected to the Denver metro area. A proposed shuttle along 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> streets and planned streetscape improvements will provide a high-level of internal mobility to pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users. Fortunately the development potential of Downtown is great. Numerous vacant parcels do nothing more than provide surface parking and await the opportunity to be developed to their highest and best use.

## Section 2: Development Potential Summary

### The Scale and Nature of Vacant and Undeveloped Parcels

Although limited in size, the development area consists of sub-areas of different character. The areas to the east of 20<sup>th</sup> St. are for the most part undeveloped. Between 20<sup>th</sup> and Park Ave South are mostly parking lots and single story buildings that house some pockets of residential, bars, a club or two and some light industrial uses. The site at 19<sup>th</sup> and Lawrence sits at the edge of the developed area. To the northeast there are some older two story buildings and a few new residential buildings have been built further east. Towards the west, is Skyline Park, an amenity that will be of advantage to the residents of the new apartment buildings that are developed in this area. A small grocery store exists in the Sakura building. To the south-east, bounded by California, Broadway and Lincoln, is the Denver's financial center. Tall office buildings are interspersed with smaller buildings and a few parking lots. Currently a significant amount of surface parking exists in the northeast part of this area. The predominantly office area which dissects the study area from east to west, around 17<sup>th</sup> St. and 18<sup>th</sup> St., includes some corporate buildings such as banks, telecommunication companies, and governmental uses such as The Court House.

The area between the 16<sup>th</sup> St. Mall and the convention center is of a more vibrant nature, with larger amounts of retail and restaurants as well as hotel rooms adjacent to the vibrant Mall and to the Convention Center. 14<sup>th</sup> St. is on one end adjacent to LoDo and Larimer St. and surrounded by residential uses and lower density buildings, but on the other hand several vacant parcels occupy the blocks along 14<sup>th</sup> Street between the Wellington E. Webb Municipal Office Building and the Convention Center. The block bound by Court, Tremont, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> streets contains four small-scale structures surrounded by surface parking. In stark contrast to each other, the Webb Building and a lonely, narrow, historic, two-story building sitting among dozens of parked cars face off on Court Street. Four more parking lots bordering 14<sup>th</sup> Street within a two-block span lend themselves to an empty, unintriguing section of the street. Between Tremont and Welton Streets along 15<sup>th</sup> Street, two large surface parking lots abut the backside of the Denver Pavilions for the entire length of two blocks. The vacant parcel at Colfax Avenue and Broadway is the only parcel in the study area that contains a plaza rather than a parking lot. The rectangular plaza, elevated above street level, sits atop RTD's Civic Center

Station and is a great vantage point for overlooking Civic Center Park, the Capitol Building and the City and County Building.

### **The Opportunities for Downtown**

The north-east boundary of the CBD represents an area of tremendous possibility for Downtown development. Existing businesses could be reestablished in the ground floors of the new high rise buildings or a section of this area could be zoned for those uses. The site at 19<sup>th</sup> and Lawrence, once fairly dense residential, could again be a vibrant addition to the city's fabric. As for Denver's financial center this represents the largest area for dense redevelopment in Denver. Not dispersed, these lots could be developed with the intent to create a unified 'neighborhood.' The increased pedestrian activity brought by the Welton light rail stop creates opportunities both for residents and for visitors. Perhaps in the spirit of TOD, less parking could be required. As a business-oriented area, the financial district calls for a similar development increasing the office inventory along with restaurants and other services to support the business community Downtown. The area west of 20<sup>th</sup> and Broadway until Curtis Park represents an opportunity for lower density mixed use or residential development. The areas west of Broadway within the CBD offer opportunities for additional mixed use office development. Similar to 17<sup>th</sup> St., some of Denver's tallest buildings are sited on Broadway and Lincoln. An addition of towers of varying heights would therefore offer more opportunities for creating Live-Work communities. The vacant lots south of 16<sup>th</sup> St. Mall call for an increased residential activity. A growing demand for hotel rooms in the area, near LoDo and the newly built cultural center of Downtown, would support new hotels along 14<sup>th</sup> St. adjacent to the Convention Center. Along 14<sup>th</sup> St., the sheer number of vacant parcels and the clustered nature of many of them provide an opportunity to generate a neighborhood feel with the development of multi-family residences. The parcels in between the Pavilions and the Convention Center, present a fantastic opportunity to develop a retail node that will enhance the Pavilions and connect it to the Convention Center. Currently, these parcels literally fall flat in promoting the Pavilions as a place of shopping, dining and entertainment and do nothing to engage conventioners and draw them to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall. Several contiguous vacant parcels northwest of the Denver Pavilions, at 15<sup>th</sup> and Welton Streets, pose the same problems. As for the parcel at Colfax and Broadway, it provides an opportunity to strengthen the southern edge of Downtown with a high-rise that will generate a new focal point along the skyline.

## Section 3: Proposed Buildout Scenario Description

### A Critical Mass: Residences, Retail & Rejuvenation

Our approach to developing the vacant parcels of Downtown focused on increasing the livability of the area while maintaining its primary function as an employment center. We added approximately 10,000 dwelling units to Downtown, creating an intense residential neighborhood around the Welton Light Rail Station. Higher residential density will create a greater demand for major residential support facilities, such as grocery stores and a department store, which the area is currently lacking.

### Proposed Development Sites

The Downtown is shifting from being primarily a business center to include residential and entertainment neighborhoods. As this shift occurs, many of the recent and current residential projects are more upscale in quality and price than preceding examples. Downtown living is becoming once again a trendy alternative, with converted warehouse and industrial buildings renovated into lofts, condominiums and rental apartments. Contributing to urban revitalization, The City can foster housing-friendly policies such as rezoning of former warehouse and industrial areas, flexible code structures to encourage re-use, and encouraging development of infill properties in the Downtown area. Focusing on a solid Downtown residential market, retail development will follow.

An insufficient amount of retail in Downtown was observed in a 2004 BID Property Owner survey<sup>1</sup>. We address this need by targeting both the residential market and the office employees, mostly commuter's market. Thus, the retail becomes the driving force behind the buildout plan, promoting its rejuvenation with approximately 780,000 SF devoted to retail. Although a small cluster of local and independent retailers is located in Downtown, particularly near LoDo, the Downtown area failed to attract national retail tenants. We believe that increasing the number of dwelling units in Downtown could encourage establishing a regional department store chain, which would serve as an anchor to Downtown retail. In order to support

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<sup>1</sup> In August 2004, staff from the Downtown Denver Partnership conducted a survey for the Downtown Denver Business Improvement District (BID). The annual survey, which was sent to 350 BID property owners and managers, inquired about the performance of the BID and key issues such as safety, cleanliness and communications.

further commercial use, we created a small cluster of hotels around the convention center, adding approximately 2,500 hotel rooms adjacent to LoDo that will increase the lively market for evening dining and shopping Downtown by conventioners. Adding some 1,500 hotel rooms in the north end of Downtown, by the Light Rail Station will address the needs of the business community as larger lots may attract corporations into Downtown.

To the northeast, at Broadway and Welton, the existing Light Rail Station offers a tremendous opportunity for high density development. The Light Rail Station would be significant node for both residents of the immediate neighborhood and residents of Uptown and Curtis Park. The vision for this area, currently consisting of surface parking lots, is a series of towers, all including a mix of uses on the ground floors. Adding density would allow pedestrian activity to support a smaller grocery, such as an urban Whole Foods or Sunflower market. With the Light Rail Station offering access, and an augmented pedestrian activity, this area could be developed into a 24-hour vibrant area. Unlike LoDo, this area is envisioned with a different mix of uses. Restaurants and bars are part of the fabric and offer street life late into the evenings, but due to increasing numbers of residents, this area could support other types of retail, boutique and necessity stores as well as a small specialty gym, a day care facility and coffee shops, creating a vibrant neighborhood that offers almost all a resident could need.

Specialty grocery chains are exploring concept stores with a smaller footprint. Whole Foods currently has a 50,000 square foot store in NW Portland, Oregon and Sunflower Market will be opening a 28,000 square foot store in NW Denver in 2006. These smaller stores offer the opportunity to integrate into more pedestrian focused neighborhoods. The 50,000 foot grocery envisioned for this neighborhood would anchor the community as well as provide a necessary service. These uses would be supported by the surrounding uptown neighborhoods as well. The edge of this development to the east represents another opportunity for infill density, with smaller buildings being woven into the existing fabric of the Uptown neighborhood. The development mentioned above represents as many as 1,265 one and two bedroom units representing a large influx of people into this area of the city, and a tightening of the connection between Uptown and Downtown.

Our plan also uses residential development to strengthen the linkage that ties the southern edge of Downtown near Colfax Avenue to the Civic Center Cultural Complex, which contains Civic Center Park, the Denver Library, the Denver Art Museum and the Colorado History Museum. This area of Downtown, between the Webb Building and the Convention Center, is dominated by office buildings and had a complete lack of housing as of 2003, according to the Downtown Denver Partnership. We propose to add five residential high-rises to Development Sites 24, 25, 28, 29 and 30 that will provide 1,436 dwelling units. This many homes in the area could support about 1,900 Downtown residents, who would require residential support facilities that would be included on the ground floors of each high-rise. The current dearth of homes in this area will make it difficult to promote the area as a residential enclave, however, recent public investments in the area, including the Webb Building, the Convention Center expansion and the planned Justice Center, should stimulate private interest.

For Development Sites 20, 21 and 22 along 15<sup>th</sup> Street, we propose a critical mass of retail that would elevate the status of the Denver Pavilions to a premier shopping destination. Development site 20 would contain 22,500 square feet of retail space that could accommodate several small to medium scale ground-floor stores. A two-story, 133,000-square-foot department store is envisioned for Development Sites 21 and 22, on the backside of the Pavilions. Exhibit 3 shows a multi-storied Target recently built in Downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota. A skyway across Glenarm Street would connect the second floors of the department store. This retail node would provide a linkage, which doesn't exist today, from the Convention Center to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall. This linkage and the pedestrian activity it would generate, combined with the department store and the existing Pavilions, would create an urban shopping experience that no suburban mall could rival. Two towers above Development Sites 21 and 22 would each contain 266,000 square feet of office space and 283 dwelling units. The vertical mix of uses in this area would create 24-hour activity, adding vitality to a street that is currently dominated by office buildings and daytime users.

The largest vacant lot on 14<sup>th</sup> St. and Arapahoe St. presents an opportunity for developing a grocery store. The typical "neighborhood store" - in terms of size, shopping experience, and travel time – would consist of approximately 70,000 SF, it would be large enough to offer the high-margin specialty departments that customers desire, including whole health sections,

pharmacies, pet centers and world-class perishables, such as organic produce. On the other end of the spectrum one can find the multi-department store offering a unique one-stop shopping experience. With Stores as big as 150,000 square feet that carry more than 225,000 food, apparel, and general merchandise products under one roof. We placed an 86,000 SF grocery store at the base of this large lot, creating a growing demand for its products by erecting two residential towers and one hotel above it. With as many as 10,300,000 SF of dwelling units added to Downtown we believe that such use can be feasible.

The new residential strip along 15<sup>th</sup> St. would benefit from the growing amount of ground floor retail. In order to support the residential use, we have added a large amount of retail in the ground floor, with various uses such as restaurants, drugstore, and indoor recreation services such as a pool and a gym. Those amenities will support Downtown living and create a vibrant core. On the same note, the office strip to the north, would benefit from ground level uses such as a diversity of specialty stores, child care facility for Downtown employees and an indoor theatre, all located within the financial district.

Both property owners and residents indicated in the BID survey mentioned above that the top three issues that need to be addressed in order to improve both safety and the perception of safety in Downtown are the presence of homeless individuals or vagrants, the presence of panhandlers and inadequate police. In order to ensure a clean, safe and vibrant Downtown, we placed a police station on Speer Blvd. and Arapahoe St. Above the police station; we placed an office tower for governmental use. Police stations vary in size in different metropolitan areas, Chicago recently completed a 42,000 SF 7th District Police Station based on prototype design, and Seattle's Southwest Police Precinct is a 30,000 SF police station. The proposed Downtown police station will answer the growing residential needs for safety and security at 26,000 SF. Exhibit 4 Shows a 2 story police station in Downtown Sacramento.

## **Conclusion**

Allowing various uses into Downtown Denver will contribute to its vibrancy and create a lively addition to its vast office use. We believe that through increasing the residential population in Downtown we can create a critical mass to support both larger amounts of retail and diverse cultural activities, thus stretching the trendy LoDo from Larimer St. into the core of Downtown with a mix of uses, population and happenings.

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## Exhibits



Exhibit 1: The Vacant Parcels behind the Denver Pavilions



Exhibit 2: Vacant Parcel in the Financial District



Exhibit 3: A Multi- Story Department Store in Minneapolis



Exhibit 4: Police Station in Downtown Sacramento