

Downtown Denver Buildout Scenario Report

“Linking Denver”

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SECTION 1: DOWNTOWN DENVER OVERVIEW

Introduction

To mark Denver's sesquicentennial in 2008, Downtown Denver is reexamining its strength, vibrancy, economic health, and quality of life. Starting early this year, the Downtown Denver Partnership and the City and County of Denver kicked off the planning process for updating the 1986 Downtown Plan. This plan will not only provide a foundation for strategic actions that shape Downtown's future in the next 20 years, but also enhance connections to surrounding neighborhoods and strengthen Downtown's role as the heart of the region as well. To assist with City of Denver and the Downtown Denver Partnership efforts, buildout scenarios which determine the maximum development potential for the vacant parcels based on current zoning have been prepared.

Extent Area

In the scope of this class, the Downtown Study area covers about 370 acres, extending from Speer Boulevard on the West side, Colfax Avenue on the South, Sherman Street on the East, 20th Avenue on the North East, and Market Street on the North West side.

Landuse

Currently, land use is comprised of mixed uses including commercial, industrial, government owned, single and multi family residential, as well as some other exempt and vacant lots. The retail and commercial areas reside mostly between the streets of 15th and 17th. The industrial and other land use types are more spread out in the downtown area. According to a survey of retail demand in downtown this year, 50% of the surveyed population is retail, 30% is restaurant, and 20% is service.

Housing and Population

In the last 30 years, downtown population has climbed by 35.6%, compared to the 8.7% increase in the city. Denver is also listed as number three in a ranking of downtowns with the highest homeownership, coming just behind Chicago and Lafayette, LA. Based on U.S. Census Bureau data, downtown residents are categorized as being racially and ethnically diverse and tend to be relatively young.

Culture

Downtown Denver is a tourist destination as contrasts between old style architecture and modern buildings make for a uniquely western city. From Larimer Square, one can enjoy a horse drawn carriage ride while admiring the elegant Victorian buildings in the mirrored glass of a skyscraper. The area is also decorated with clean streets, open plazas, views of the interesting architecture, picturesque streetscapes, and fountains and statues.

Aside from the boutique style shops, outdoor cafes, and open courtyards, downtown Denver is a center for art and cultural activities. The Denver Performing Arts Complex can offer over 10,000 seats and ten performance venues. Buell Theatre is the home of Broadway shows, Boettcher Concert Hall, the symphony hall, and several theaters that make the complex a place for actors and singers to exhibit their talents.

Transportation

Downtown Denver is also highly navigatable by mass transportation. On 16th Street, free shuttle buses depart every 90 seconds which makes it simple to move about the downtown core. Light rail goes through downtown from Broadway station, stops at 16th Street and California Street, and ends at Downing Street. Union Station is also the hub for AMTRAK trains and is also the departure point for the Winter Park bound Ski Train.

Recently, a master plan for developing a multimodal transit hub at the Denver Union Station has been completed. An Environmental Impact Statement is currently underway to evaluate impacts and mitigation of any environmental consequences related to full buildout of the Denver Union Station as a high-density, mixed-use, transit-oriented development. In 2004, Denver region voters approved a tax increase to build a regional transit system composed of light rail,

commuter rail, bus rapid transit and bus service, collectively known as FasTracks. With the building of FasTracks, downtown Denver will be the central connection to the Denver International Airport as well as other transit corridors in the greater Denver region.

Parking

Downtown parking comprises of street parking meters as well as public and private lots and garages. Parking fees vary in price and several lots offer evening and weekend parking at discounted rates. Recently parking meters fees have decreased to a dollar per hour with a two-hour limit in the central downtown business district.

Neighborhoods

Adjacent to the downtown Denver area are the Auraria and Civic Center neighborhoods, which comprise largely of educational and governmental offices. The nearby Five Points, North Capitol Hill, Capitol Hill, Highland and Jefferson Park neighborhoods have high residential densities. In the Downtown Denver Area Plan, downtown is not to develop in isolation of its surroundings and should enhance connections to adjoining neighborhoods.

Economy and Opportunities

Downtown Denver has its own assets and opportunities to develop in the next 25 years. During the year of 2004, downtown Denver has benefited from a substantial improvement in the State economy (3.8% increase in Gross State Product) with the retail sales increasing to 4.4%, unemployment decreasing by 5.2%, housing permits increasing by 25%, but office vacancy are remain at 14.6%. Downtown Denver benefits from strong transportation infrastructure and commitments to expand mass transit systems. This has potential to serve as a base for future transit related growth markets.

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF VACANT PARCELS

This section is an overview of the scale and nature of the vacant parcels found in downtown Denver. Discussed are the locations of the parcels contained in the study area in regards to their adjacency to each other and to developed parcels. This relationship contributes to the

environment of downtown Denver. This also creates opportunities for the future development of downtown Denver.

Location

The 72 parcels studied are located in the an area bounded by Speer Boulevard on the West, Colfax Avenue on the South, Sherman Street on the East, 20th Avenue on the North East, and Market Street on the North West. Many of the vacant/undeveloped parcels in downtown Denver are being used as parking lots. To explain the parcels they have been divided into four areas. The first area is bordered by Speer Boulevard on the West side and 15th Street on the East side (see figure 1). Inside these bounds there are 28 parcels of which we have studied. The second area is bordered by 15th Street on the West side and 18th Street on the East side (see figure 2). Inside these boundaries are 23 parcels. The third area is located between 18th Street and 20th Street, inside this area there are 9 parcels (see figure 3). The fourth area is bounded by Broadway on the West and Sherman on the East, it contains 12 parcels (see figure 4).

Scale and Nature

Area One

The 28 parcels contained in the first area are all relatively small with the exception of the largest parcel found in the entire study area. Parcel 26 is the entire block Northeast of Hotel Teatro (1100 14th Street). The remaining parcels resemble the size of a quarter block.

Area Two

Area two is the center core of downtown Denver as well as the area of study. The 23 parcels contained in this area are smaller than the parcels of the previous area. These parcels are the nearest to the 16th Street Mall.

Area Three

The 9 parcels found in the third area are split – half are big and half are small. The larger parcels average a half of a block in size, while the smaller parcels combined are smaller than a third of a block.

Area Four

This area contains 12 parcels. These parcels are very close in adjacency to each other, as they are found in a 5 block area. The average size of parcels in this area is about half a block.

Affects

Area One

These parcels are adjacent to the Convention Center and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, as well as to the Auraria Campus. The parcels located in the Southeast end of this area are close to the Wellington Webb Building as well as the Civic Center. Currently these parcels provide surface parking for the users of the surrounding facilities.

Area Two

Most of these parcels are parking lots servicing the businesses surrounding the 16th Street Mall. These parcels are situated between tall buildings. Many of the parcels offer contrast from the overwhelming height of the building located in the area.

Area Three

These parcels are found in the edge of the high-rise building district of downtown Denver. This area has a mix of tall buildings, short buildings, and no buildings at all. To the Northeast of this area are single family homes, and small apartment buildings. This area acts as a buffer between the high-rise, business area of downtown and the low-rise area of Denver.

Area Four

The parcels found in the area are surface parking lots. The exception is parcel 73, which is the land above the Civic Center Bus Station. To the East of this area is the Uptown Neighborhood and business district.

Opportunities

Area One

The opportunities for this area lie within the realm of tourism. With their adjacency to the Convention Center and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts these parcels have the potential to provide lots for hotels and restaurants to service the users of these facilities.

Area Two

These parcels have great potential to complement the buildings around them. Given projections for future downtown population and the composition surrounding buildings, office spaces are highly suitable in this area. These parcels offer the opportunity to insert additional offices buildings back to the city center of downtown Denver.

Area Three

These vacant parcels offer opportunities to further develop the edge between the central business district of Denver and adjoining residential neighborhoods of the area.

Area Four

In the Uptown Neighborhood to the East of this area, residential units are highly desirable. This area offers a close proximity to downtown and is free of skyscrapers. The parcels in this area offer the opportunity for incorporating additional residential units.

SECTION 3: PROPOSED BUILDOUT DESCRIPTION

The proposed buildout of downtown Denver is guided by several goals and principals which serve as the scaffolding form which the design and buildout materialize. The overarching goal of this proposal is to strengthen existing use nodes with complementary and supporting uses. The objective is to support design seeds that have already been planted – and implemented – such as the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Denver Convention Center, and the 16th Street Mall in furthering their success and original design intent as important social nodes. Furthermore, by strengthening the connections between these social hotspots, it is believed that the overall quality of downtown Denver as a *place* will be improved. It is to this end that the following design, assumptions, and decisions have been made.

Design

In this study, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts (DCPA), Denver Convention Center (DCC), and 16th Street Mall are identified as social nodes of significance. These areas are considered the critical axis and starting points of the buildout design. To further support these areas, complementary uses are intended to fill the buildable parcels most adjacent to these

social nodes. For example, a highly suitable land use for parcels near the convention center may include hotels with service oriented retail on the lower floors. Such land uses directly serve the needs of this social node. Furthermore, such land uses may be used as a tool for connecting disparate social nodes. The three areas identified as key social nodes make the shape of two adjacent circles (DCPA and DCC) with an arc (16th Street Mall) hovering above “=” (see figure 5). The design objective is to connect the areas between these nodes with uses that support and add vitality.

In the example above, a hotel was used to support the convention center. This same use, used strategically, has added value should it also be located proximal to the 16th Street Mall social node where retail and office abound. Consider it possible to have a hotel located in one of two possible (hypothetical) locations – both of which being equidistant to the convention center – but only one near 16th Street Mall. The optimum location in this design is that which is in-between two social nodes. This strategy allows for greater connection of social nodes. In the example, the hotel near both 16th Street Mall and the Convention Center offers greater opportunity for hotel residence to visit either destination whereas the hotel located near the convention center alone limits easy access only to the Convention Center, and perhaps limiting service to those offered by the hotel (sans 16th Street Mall services). The example discussed above illustrates a common strategy used to achieve this proposal’s design vision. However, the actual relationships between design vision and the proposed buildout will be discussed in greater detail below.

Initially, the design intent for downtown guides the placement of hotel, retail, office, and service retail uses. The placement of these uses then serves as a springboard for locating residential parcels as these are viewed as secondary supporters in the proposed design intent. That is, residential lots are used to fill-in the areas already dedicated to supporting social nodes. As a general rule, this takes the form of a large residential buffer around the “?” shaped connected social nodes (see figure 6). This is, however, a simplification of the proposed design – use areas are less prescribed as to avoid the creation of *hard edges* where one use type abruptly transitions to another. Hard edges are mitigated by mixing uses vertically in areas of transition. An example of such a case is illustrated in the parcels adjoining the intersection of Broadway, Welton, and 19th Street. This area is relatively removed from the social node portion of

downtown and should be allocated as residential under strict interpretation of the proposed downtown vision. This is, however, a transition area and is surrounded by office and residential uses. In response, these developable parcels have been prescribed mixed use with retail (including residential support) on the first floor, office no higher than three floors above parking, and residential above that. This strategy is used to lessen the sense of a hard edge between use districts and is found throughout the study area.

Buildout

In the end, it is proposed that 22,297,548 square feet of gross floor area be added to the downtown study area. Of this space, 7,597,850 square feet is residential (4,476 one-bedroom residential units and 3,160 two-bedroom units), 837,076 square feet is retail space (which includes residential support and pedestrian-active areas), 2,520,949 square feet is office, and there are 6,627 hotel rooms (approximately 1,656,750 square feet). Of the uses proposed above, 60% is residential, 20% is office, 13% is hotel, and 7% is retail, residential support, and pedestrian-active uses.

The overall composition of buildout results from several targets set at the project's onset. These targets respond to the existing composition of downtown, perceived needs, and general trends. It is determined that residential uses should account for the bulk of downtown buildout. This decision is based on the perception that office and hotel uses are already near, or above, capacity – and that residential demands (will) outweigh those of office and hotel. Although office is perceived to be well accounted for in the existing downtown paradigm, new office space is viewed as an essential component of a full buildout plan nonetheless. With additional residential space slated for downtown so too are the workplaces associated with a booming population. The spaces allotted for office never exceed 19 floors – and are typically in the 13 to 17 floor range and floor areas are generally small. Also, several 1 to 3 floor lower-level offices are added in transition areas. Furthermore, it is not intended that an office building of the *Qwest* magnitude be built.

Targets for hotel space respond to the perceived demands of business, social activity, tourism, and other assorted causes. Primarily, hotel distribution is adjacent to social nodes and business – as is required by the overall downtown vision discussed earlier. Retail targets are based on

maintaining current proportions. No large malls are planned in this proposal, however, first floors generally fall within the retail category and two floors of retail are occasionally found in the proposed buildout (especially in the social node and transition portions of downtown).

Example

To better understand how the goals, targets, and general design objectives mesh and take form on the ground, it may be helpful to focus attention on a specific area of the plan. For example, the block of 15th Street, Curtis, 16th Street, and Champa (Site ID #27 and 103) is near a social hub and along a connecting artery. According to a strict interpretation of the design intent – the expected use would be office, hotel, or retail. However, nuances introduced by target use percentages and a consideration of adjacent uses suggest a more modified solution. The approach used on this block calls for retail on the first floor, office on the four proceeding floors, and residential units thereafter. The retail and office units assist in the overall goal of supporting downtown social nodes with complementary uses. The residential units help downtown buildout meet established target figures. Furthermore, the mix of retail, office, and residential ensures activity at all hours of day and night. This is something often lost in homogeneous lot uses as offices vacate in the evenings and residences tend to vacate during the day. It has therefore been determined that these uses will best support the 15th Street, Curtis, 16th Street, and Champa block and the overall connectivity of the social node. Similar patterns are found in the parcels near 14th Street and Tremont (Site ID: #54, 62, 63, and 82) where proximity to downtown social nodes suggest supporting uses such as retail and office, but surrounding uses and building totals demand more residential space. The mixing of these uses is highly appropriate in these areas.

EXHIBITS

Figure 1: Area 1



Figure 2: Area 2

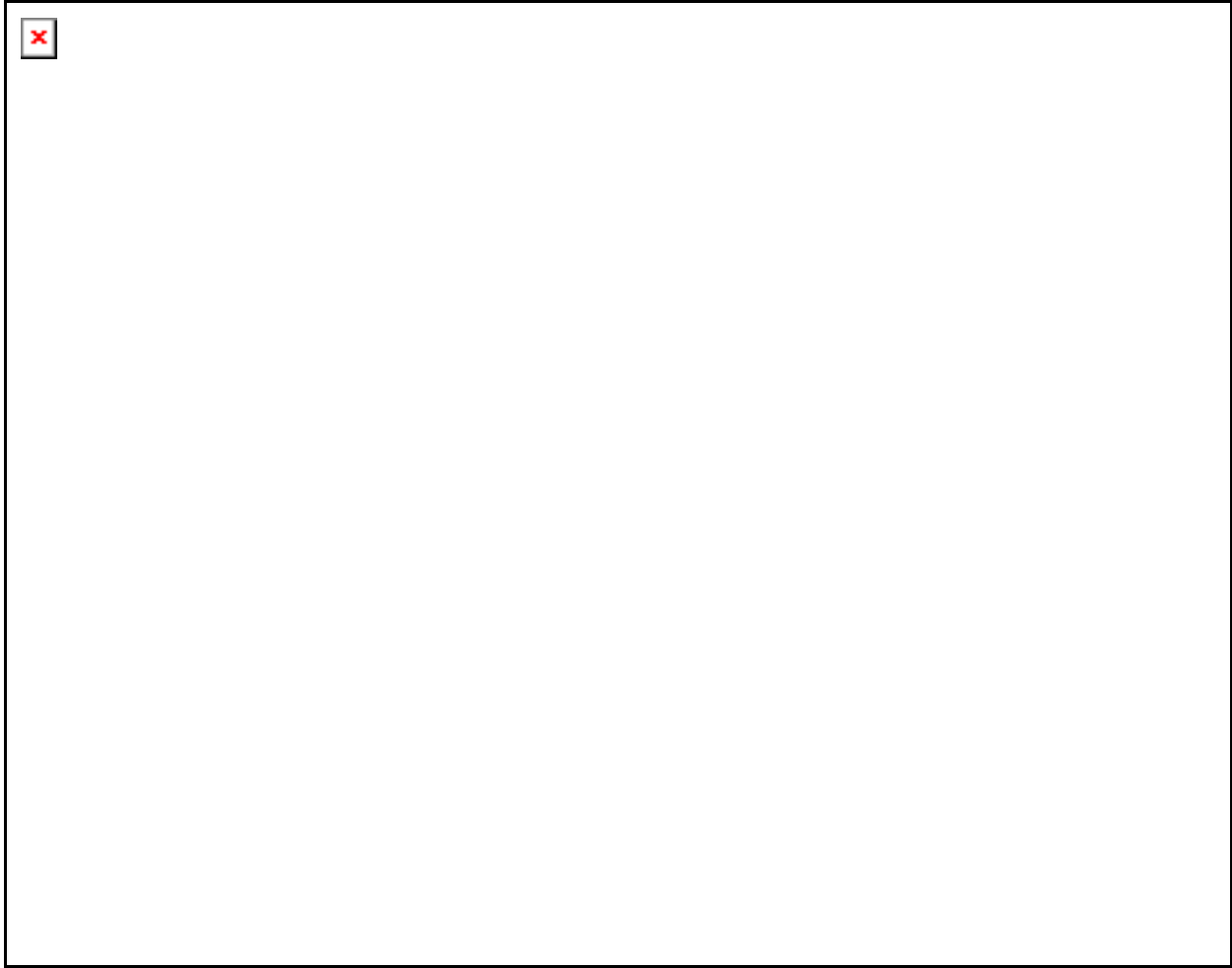


Figure 3: Area 3



Figure 4: Area 4

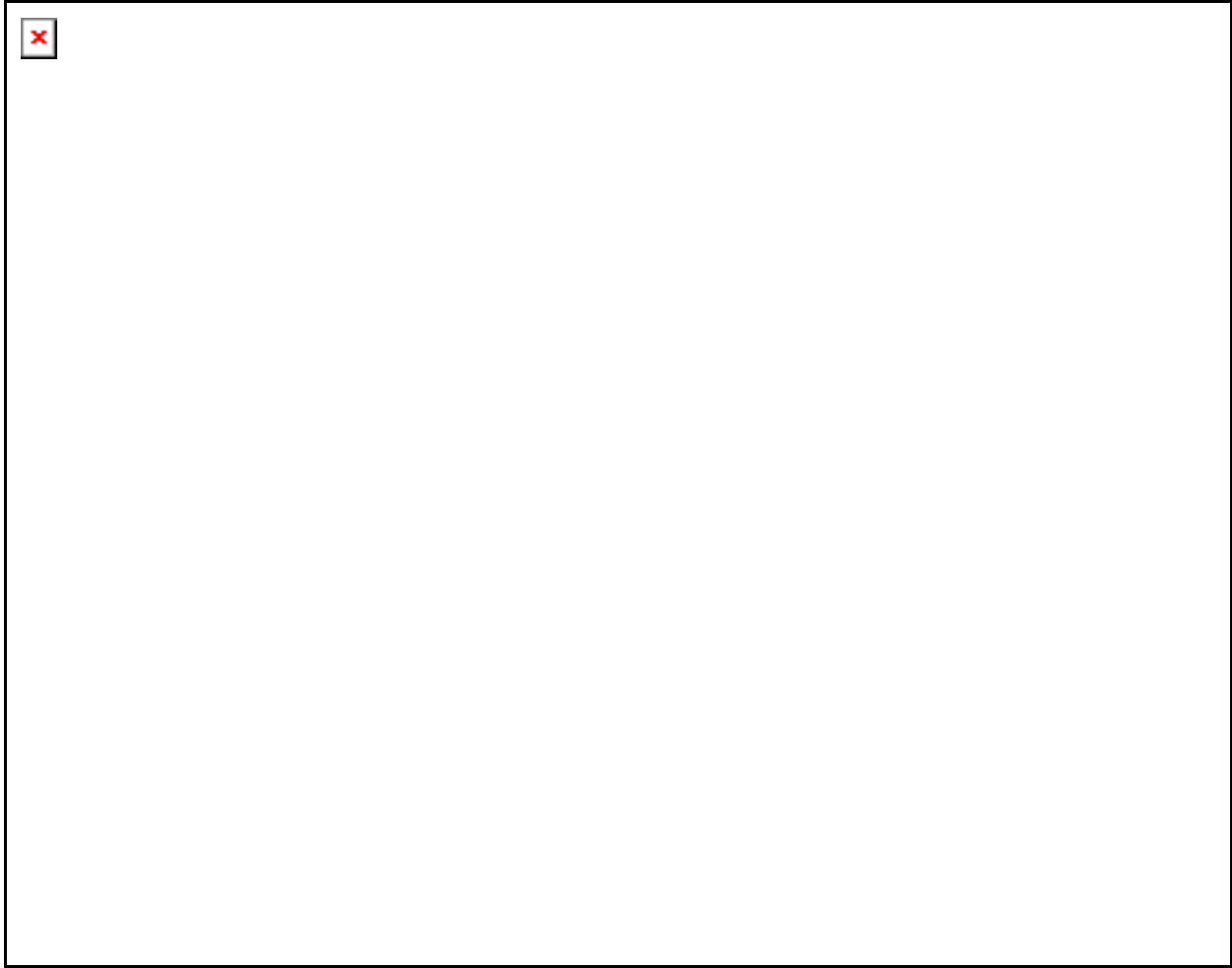


Figure 5: Parti Diagram of concept...Linking Denver



Figure 6: Future Land Use Map

Figure 7: Development Quantity Table