

**Final Project: Downtown Denver Plan Update
Downtown Buildout Scenarios**

“Sell Your Car”

**Planning Methods I
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DOWNTOWN DENVER OVERVIEW

Downtown Denver is divided into four main districts. These districts split the area into almost equal quadrants. The northern quadrant is considered the Business District. The eastern quadrant is the Government District. The southern quadrant is best described as the Arts and Entertainment District. And the western quadrant is clearly defined as the Lower Downtown District, more commonly known as “Lodo”.

The northern edge of Downtown consists mainly of office and business uses. The appeal of the area is the close proximity of businesses to one another and business related resources. The Business District can be defined as the area to the north of 17th Street, to the east of Lawrence, to the south of 20th Street, and to the west of Welton. This area is mainly comprised of weekday, 8 to 5 office jobs, leaving the area inactive and isolated on the nights and weekends. This district contains almost no residential uses, which may be a byproduct of the seemingly scarce shopping, parking, and residential resources of the area.

The eastern quadrant is considered the Civic or Government District. This district includes the City and County Building, the Capital, the Wellington Webb Municipal Building, the US Mint and the Denver Public Library. 20th Street to the north, Sherman Street to the east, Colfax to the south, and Welton to the west define this district. Similar to the Business District, the Governmental District is heavily utilized Monday through Friday from 8 to 5 and is left an isolated ghost town on nights and weekends. This district also has very limited residential and commercial due to its primarily governmental nature.

The southern most district of Downtown Denver is primarily where all of the arts and entertainment is located. This Arts and Entertainment District includes most of 16th Street Mall, the entire Center for Performing Arts, the Convention Center and the Denver Pavilions, which has not only has the best shopping downtown, but also has restaurants, clubs, and even a bowling alley. This district is loosely defined as the area north of Speer Boulevard, east of Welton, south of 17th Street, and west of Lawrence Street. Because of the appeal of its many amenities, the Arts and Entertainment District has more residential than both the Business and Government Districts.

The furthest west of the downtown districts is Lower Downtown or Lodo. Lodo is often considered the main attraction of downtown Denver. The boundaries for this district are primarily 20th Street to the north, Lawrence Street to the east, and Speer Boulevard and Blake Street to the west. Not only is Lodo beautiful and comfortable with its historic charm and building height limits, but the many restaurants, clubs and bars make it a popular destination for a night on the town. Coors Field has also immensely enhanced the attraction of this area to both local residents and tourists. The many appealing factors of the Lodo District support the fact that it has the highest residential use in the entire Downtown Denver.

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL SUMMARY

In the first two decades since World War II, Denver, like most American cities, was ravaged by urban renewal efforts combined with an exodus of the middle class to the suburbs. Once much of the population left central Denver, the jobs followed in the form of suburban office parks located in outlying communities and connected by highways and suburban arterials to make commuting between suburbs easier. Downtown Denver continued to fade in importance, despite a brief but highly productive office building boom in the early 1980's.

In recent years, Downtown Denver has seen a resurgence of new development and the revitalization of once abandoned areas. With three new sports stadiums, the new Convention Center, a new library and museum, a revitalized Performing Arts Center, the shopping and nightlife of Lodo and Larimer, the success of the adjacent Central Platte Valley and many proposed new developments on the books, Downtown is once again the heart of the Denver region and not merely its namesake. Though there are still less than 10,000 residents living downtown and office vacancy rates are high, it has become an entertainment and cultural destination that is increasingly well-served by mass transit.

Downtown Denver's development potential is very strong. Despite the changing face of the Downtown Area, there still remain sites that act as holes in the city's fabric. Many of these vacant or underdeveloped parcels are surface parking lots that do not contribute to the richness of the city and often are viewed as cold, dark, asphalt wastelands. When there are clusters or groups of vacant buildings or stark parking lots engulfing the downtown area, the prominent character of the city is lost. Many of the surface parking lots are in fact adjacent to each other,

creating a high potential for many development opportunities. The highest concentration of undeveloped properties in downtown exists primarily in the north east. The high business and governmental activity in the vicinity demands auxiliary uses to enhance the vibrancy of this area for work and play leaving it ripe for development opportunities.

PROPOSED BUILDOUT SCENARIO DESCRIPTION

When approaching the project of maximizing the buildout of Downtown Denver, we first looked at Downtown within the context of the entire region of Metro Denver and the trends witnessed over the past fifty years. From this analysis of what brought downtown to its present situation, as well as an eye toward current market trends, we have proposed a strong emphasis on new residential development and the accompanying retail needed to service this new downtown population.

The historic changes in the region's population distribution, and Downtown's recent revival, have changed commuting patterns, and we need to alter our thinking as a result. Metro residents now often commute from suburb to suburb or, increasingly, live downtown but commute to suburban office parks. FasTracks has inspired plans for mixed-use TOD's (Transit Oriented Developments) throughout the metro area, and one can now see downtown as, essentially, the largest TOD in the region. In order to bring 24 hour vitality to downtown, the one main piece of the puzzle currently missing, it is critical that more residential and retail are developed to bring it into balance with the present office space levels, and transform Downtown Denver into a true mixed-use zone and a thriving urban neighborhood.

To fulfill the primary goal of increasing residential and retail throughout downtown, we have designated most vacant parcels as residential sites with ground floor retail. Since the current built environment consists mainly of office space with only corridors of retail, such as the 16th Street Mall, the emphasis was on distributing residential and retail throughout Downtown Denver in order to distribute vitality throughout the area. The exceptions to this are the clustering of new hotels around the Colorado Convention Center, and the placement of new office space near the fringe of the proposal area.

In order to transform Downtown Denver into a pedestrian friendly urban neighborhood and allow people to forgo their cars if they choose, it is important to provide the retail amenities that any urban village or TOD needs. We have designated three sites (parcels 23, 34 and 36 on the attached map) to host grocery stores for Downtown dwellers. These grocery stores are spaced such that any resident within the proposal area could walk to the nearest store within a few minutes time. In all, the plan contains 624,947 square feet of new retail.

Additionally, a Target is proposed (parcel 31) to serve central Downtown. Department stores in general are lacking in the area and, since Target is popular with a very broad demographic group, it seemed the most appropriate store to serve a diverse Downtown population. This is backed up by a recent survey commissioned by the Downtown Denver Partnership, which concluded that Target rose to the top of desired retailers for the area. The site for Target was chosen for its size as well as its proximity to the Denver Pavilions and the 16th Street Mall, which could provide a boost toward a critical mass of retailing in the area needed to compete with nearby Cherry Creek. The store would face Welton Street, currently one of the main pedestrian corridors crossing 16th Street. The hope is that this Target would also spur the revitalization of the two or three adjacent blocks of the 16th Street Mall that are now largely home to tourist shops selling T-shirts, snow globes and other trinkets.

Also centrally located in this plan is a proposed public marketplace. This combined Farmer's Market and Arts and Crafts Market would host local products in a prominent ground floor location (parcel 26 on the attached map). Above the public market, artist lofts and studios are planned for resident artists. Its position on Champa Street, connecting the Performing Arts Center and Convention Center with the 16th Street Mall, allows tourists and residents alike to easily discover the public market, and it demonstrates Denver's commitment to the Arts and the development of creativity in the city.

With the Auraria Campus projected to grow from a collection of commuter schools to an increasingly dense area with on-campus housing, it is important to tie it in to downtown. To this end, we have proposed several residential developments along Lawrence Street, adjacent to the CU buildings, which could be home to students and faculty. Perhaps a pedestrian bridge or

other pedestrian crossing over Speer Boulevard could be implemented to bring more foot traffic and cohesion between this area and the main Auraria Campus.

In all, this proposal contains 7,056 1-bedroom units and 4,989 2-bedroom units, giving Downtown Denver a total of 12,045 units in 12,016,958 square feet of new residential space. If one can estimate an average of two residents per unit, that would add over 24,000 new comers to the current 9,000 residents. More than tripling the population in the area would bring with it a vitality that would not only boost retail and pedestrian traffic, but make Downtown Denver office space much more of a commodity as well.

By tripling the residential population, Downtown Denver could have the same draw that suburban office parks have had in recruiting tenants who wanted to work near their homes. This would generate more competition for office space and help to drive up rents to more sustainable levels for the building owners. Additionally, a thriving Downtown would create an excitement around locating a business here as it does in cities like Chicago or New York. This added clout associated with a Downtown Denver address would add even further vitality to the city.

Though the focus of this proposal has been on increasing the residential and retail square footage to balance the current amount of undervalued office space, we have not neglected the development of new office space in the area. We have proposed a total of 3,174,304 square feet of new office space in carefully selected sites at the periphery of the Plan area, the majority of which are located in large parcels along Lincoln. The reasoning behind this is that there is already plenty of residential space within the adjacent Uptown neighborhood, and these large parcels are needed to attract potential corporate headquarters to a Downtown Denver largely lacking in sites big enough to accommodate another Qwest-size office tower.

As mentioned earlier, we have clustered all proposed new hotel rooms, 5,027 in total, around the newly expanded Colorado Convention Center. This would almost double the number of rooms in Downtown Denver, currently estimated by the Downtown Denver Partnership at about 5,300. Though primarily placed here to serve an expanding convention crowd, the hotel sites are also within easy walking distance of the Auraria Campus, most of the Downtown Denver office space, as well as the 16th Street Mall shopping corridor. This area is also well-served by

buses and light rail, which will eventually link it to DIA via Union Station and make transit much easier for future city guests.

Some of the concepts discussed here may be outside the scope of a project designed to maximize land use in Downtown Denver, but we feel compelled to mention them. It is critical for the city to make provisions to both require and promote the development of mixed-income housing and hotels if this urban neighborhood is to be successful. A downtown lacking in diversity will be a downtown short on vitality. We would also encourage the development of some downtown parcels into small parks, rather than buildings, in order to provide welcoming refuges to visitors and pavement-weary residents alike. These parks could serve as local gathering spots for picnics, evening movies, community gardening, dog exercise and other recreational needs. Tax credits and other incentives for “green” buildings would also be welcomed to demonstrate Denver’s commitment to reducing energy and resource consumption. Additionally, it is our recommendation that more downtown bike lanes be instituted to increase the multi-modal transit options and further reduce reliance on the automobile. Though current zoning required the need for 25,585 parking spaces in this proposal, it is our hope that this number may drop over time as city leaders see that fewer Downtown residents and visitors rely on cars as their primary mode of transit. Downtown Denver has a choice to either build an urban neighborhood for the people or for their cars, and we encourage the city’s message to Downtown Denver residents to be “Sell Your Car.”