

**DOWNTOWN DENVER BUILD-OUT SCENARIO REPORT:
AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD**

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Section One: Downtown Denver Overview

Study Area

For the purposes of creating this build-out scenario, the study area was bounded by Speer on the western edge, the alley between Market and Larimer Streets to the northwest, 20th Street on the northeast, the alley between Lincoln and Sherman to the East, and Colfax Avenue for the southern border. Within this area, we created a maximum build-out scenario and preferred alternative plans concerning the redevelopment of parcels currently used as parking lots. These parcels have been combined into a total of 54 parcels with the use of each parcel based upon the context of the surrounding uses.

Downtown Development

In the 1970's and 1980's, the nature of downtown Denver began to change with the construction of tall office and condominium towers. At the same time, the warehouse and brick commercial buildings that defined Denver's past remained. Denver was attempting to make the leap from a regional center to a national city. During the last decade, Denver has experienced a rebirth with the recently expanded Convention Center, concerts and sporting events at the Pepsi Center, baseball games at Coors Field, events at the Denver Performing Arts complex, bars and restaurants in Lodo, and the restaurants and shopping on the 16th Street Mall. Jobs have been created as a result of these activities and there has also been a dramatic increase in the number of housing units in the area between Union Station and the Platte River, and throughout the downtown area. It has become trendy again to live downtown. There are plenty of apartments for rent and condos for sale and they do not remain unoccupied for long. Most of these developments are characterized as creative reuses of old buildings and unique in terms of their melding of old and new architectural styles. They fit nicely into the existing building stock and complement downtown's urban fabric. Frequently, former warehouses and industrial buildings were converted into the aforementioned uses. Many of the older buildings are now redeveloped. Only vacant land near Union Station and underutilized parking lots scattered within the study area have potential for development. The steady pace of recent development suggest that Denver can support more housing and thus, more retail and commercial activities that provide neighborhood services, such as grocery stores, retail stores such as Target, Ikea, Kohl's, and other services that are present in residential areas.

Impact of Transportation on Future Development

The placement of transit lines in and around downtown have had a major impact in the success of downtown. The 16th street Mall Shuttle carries 63,000 passengers every weekday and the light rail brings thousands of people into the heart of downtown. These have codified certain streets within downtown as areas of intense activity and have connected surrounding cities with activities in downtown. As an alternative to public transit, there are 55,000 parking spots downtown (Downtown Denver Partnership). However, with current transit routes and the potential impact of the future redevelopment of Union Station into a regional transportation center, demand for parking may decrease due to the accessibility and ease of future public transit options, thus providing the opportunities and incentives for development of surface parking lots as outlined in our plan.

Section 2: Development Potential Summary

Many of the undeveloped parcels in the Downtown area are currently occupied by surface parking lots. These parking lots offer limited benefits and would better serve the City of Denver if they were redeveloped as either residential or retail buildings. Many of the residential buildings that were suggested in the matrix include ground floor retail or some other type of residential support space. Amendments were made in order to maximize the shared mixed-use possibilities of each building, as well as, to provide density bonuses for each building site. Many of these building improvements were mixed-use buildings that are spread throughout the downtown redevelopment area and include underground parking.

Downtown Denver has never had a shortage of office space and is currently struggling to maintain occupancy. Therefore, it is not essential to develop new office buildings for the foreseeable future. Residential and retail development is not only a necessary product for the vitality of downtown, but is development that would be more saleable for the city. Recommendations for office space were made in the B-5 OD 4 zone, next to Speer Street, as well as, in the B-5 zone, located behind the pavilions. This was done due to the surrounding environs, which we determined less optimal for residential or

retail development. Speer Street is a busy 6 lane main road that receives regular traffic, thus, it does not lend to pedestrian traffic or a quality living environment. In addition, ground floor retail that is either struggling or failing can easily be converted into office space in the future.

Approximately 90% of the recommendations for building improvements call for residential development. This is due to several factors that include 1) the surge in population growth in this area, 2) the growing popularity of living in lofts in the Downtown area, and 3) an increased desire to reduce sprawl and preserve Colorado's foothills. The plan calls for residential development around UCD buildings that will serve UCD students. In addition, recommendations for residential development in the B-5 OD 3 zoning district are emphasized in order to establish neighborhood support for the new retail and office developments. This area was also chosen in order to create a seamless transition from the Capital Hill Neighborhood to Downtown.

Hotels in Downtown Denver are becoming increasingly pricy; therefore, it was recommended that several new hotels be added to the area. These hotels were envisioned to be of a moderate pricing, however, maintaining an aesthetic appeal. Many of the hotels were placed around the Convention Center (CC) and were done with the expectation that there would be complementary use and support for the hotels from the CC and the University. Incentives should be offered to attract median priced hotels that would complement the surrounding area and provide diversity in the downtown hotel market, which is primarily high-priced and luxury hotels. Parcels closer to the CC, should be reserved for high priced hotels that cater to tourists and visitors wishing to enjoy and indulge in the Downtown area. This use will support the ground floor retail and help maintain a vital economy.

Public transportation throughout this area is extremely accessible and can accommodate large numbers of people. There are light-rail stops located at the Auraria campus, Convention Center, 16th Street Mall, 18th and California, 30th and Downing, Union Station, and Elitch Gardens. Future RTD plans will improve this system, as mentioned earlier, and will continue to support an influx of residents, employees, and tourists. Denver also provides a free mall shuttle that runs between Colfax and Union Station on 16th, an extensive bus system, taxi services, and a number of bicycle racks.

Transportation in this area is both multi-modal and extensive, creating an easily accessible environment for residents who want multiple transportation options. Transportation plans proposed by RTD will be valuable in supporting our build-out scenario.

Section Three: Proposed Build-out Scenario Description

“Downtown Denver: An Urban Neighborhood” creates a great place to live, work, and play. The vision for our plan is to increase the number of downtown residential units and to create vital nodes of office and retail uses. This plan will increase downtown activity, increase tax revenues, conserve the environment, and encourage social diversity. The goals and objectives of our plan are to:

- increase the downtown residential population to increase tax revenues through retail sales and property taxes
- populate areas to informally ‘police’ the streets, increasing safety encourage diversity by providing choices for recreation, work, and housing
- help the environment by increasing walk-ability
- offer convenience by mixing uses between residential, retail, and office
- create nodes and districts by grouping complimentary uses
- increase density to promote vitality

Increased Residential Population

Our plan increases the population of downtown residents by building residential buildings on twenty-one of the fifty-four identified undeveloped lots. The plan provides 12,128,346 new square feet of residential downtown, providing approximately 7,100 more one-bedroom units and 5,100 more two-bedroom units. Approximately 75% of the new square footage we propose for downtown is residential.

Assuming an average of two residents per unit, the plan would allow for at least 24,200 additional downtown residents. According to Colorado State Demography, the population of Denver, Boulder, and Greeley counties is expected to grow by 37%, approximately 983,000 people, between 2000 and 2020 (Kristal Kraft 2005). Therefore we feel it is reasonable and necessary to provide substantially more housing options in downtown Denver.

The decision to dramatically increase residential capacity downtown is based upon current trends in markets and planning. First, the market is dictating downtown living, and residential building downtown is a hot market. Second, increasing residential will increase the property and sales tax base. The new residents will purchase goods and services, supporting local businesses. Third, increasing gasoline prices projected into the future, in conjunction with proposed increases in transit service, will further motivate people to move downtown to save on commuting costs.

Increasing residential uses in downtown is also a response to excessive office space. While the vacancy rates in downtown offices are low, these offices are generating very low rents because there is a glut of offices on the market in Denver.

Many people believe downtown is unsafe. An excellent way to minimize crime is to increase uses at all times of the day. With more residential uses downtown, people will be walking or watching the streets at all hours. This informal 'policing' will reduce crime and increase the perception of safety downtown.

Encouraging Diversity

The plan encourages diversity. With increased density compared to typical choices outside of downtown, there is the potential to require a certain percentage of housing remain affordable, thus lowering costs and providing options to people with a range of economic backgrounds. Finally, the plan recommends parks on six lots downtown. These parks provide free recreation and another alternative to current choices for downtown recreation. With more parks, downtown will begin to feel more like a neighborhood; a place where families live. Our plan will encourage more families to move downtown and increase the amount of money coming into the local schools. By bringing more families into the area, the population will become more demographically diverse.

Mixing uses

The plan increases convenience for people downtown by mixing uses. All of the new buildings in the plan serve multiple purposes such as residential with retail on the ground floor or office with retail on the ground floor. This mix of uses will increase the desirability of living downtown because it will save people time and create an interesting urban landscape. The downtown population will not need to drive everywhere, thus increasing pedestrian traffic downtown and helping conserve the environment.

We chose to place retail on the ground floor based upon market studies which have shown that retail is most likely to succeed when it is accessible and easily viewed. Our plan introduces approximately 1,480,000 square feet of retail into downtown Denver.

Creating Nodes and Districts

Downtown Denver: An Urban Neighborhood carefully groups land uses into nodes and districts in order to increase convenience and a sense of organic unity while preserving interest and diversity.

The first residential district is located in the northeast portion of the study area. This area is appropriate for residential because it is a relatively quiet area in the outskirts of downtown. In addition, it is near existing residential neighborhoods of Five Points and Uptown. Slightly lower land prices support larger retail uses such as a grocery store and parks. We have proposed a grocery store in lot 18 and a park in lot 72. These uses will create a comfortable residential district.

The second residential district is located in the southern portion of the study area. This district is also on the outskirts of downtown in a relatively quiet area, yet it is near the cultural centers of Denver such as the Performing Arts Center and Lodo. Residential in this area is supported by a park in lot 54, several lots of residential support, and a childcare facility.

The plan provides six hotels, approximately 4000 rooms, each of which creates a node for tourism and other recreational uses. The hotels are surrounded by retail uses. They

are distributed throughout downtown to offset the current dearth of hotel rooms. Each hotel is located near an attraction including the two residential districts, Lodo, the Convention Center, and the Performing Arts Center.

The hotel on parcel 73 will service the government buildings in Denver including the Wellington Webb Municipal building and the Capitol. In addition, the hotel has a large plaza surrounding by retail and food courts to meet the needs of government workers and transit users who often mingle for long periods of time.

The plan builds offices behind the Denver pavilion because the offices will support the government activities in the district and because the office users will support the retail of the pavilions during the day. The plan provides approximately 2,700,000 square feet of office space. This number will accommodate the population growth in the Front Range but will ensure the ability to command sustainable rents.

In Downtown Denver: An Urban Neighborhood, downtown Denver is revitalized through smart planning that accommodates current market preferences and will fall in line with future trends. Increased residential uses, diversity, strong nodes and districts, convenience, and walk-ability, will make Denver a fantastic place to live, work, and play.

References

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