

DOWNTOWN DENVER BUILDOUT SCENARIO REPORT:
Denver's Urban Village

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SECTION 1: Downtown Denver Overview

The Downtown Denver of today can be described as an exciting and vibrant urban atmosphere that draws people in from all walks of life. Both the environment and the people of downtown have been becoming more diverse in recent years. Central Downtown now offers a mixed array of offices, shops, department stores, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, hotels, and residential dwellings that appeal to many different people. In addition, Downtown Denver possesses the nation's second largest performing arts center: The Denver Performing Arts Complex, which houses the Boettcher Concert Hall, The Denver Theater Company, and the Temple Buell Theater. Located nearby is the Convention Center which is also a major draw for both residents and visitors. The Sixteenth Street Mall is another one of Downtown's jewels that brings in visitors from both far and near. This outdoor pedestrian friendly mall promotes a more walkable downtown and encourages more people to utilize the city's public transit systems.

Downtown Denver is characterized by its' vigorous and fashionable lifestyle. An active nightlife, with popular venues, appeals to a diverse crowd of residents and visitors who frequent the area. People of all ages and cultures are drawn to the unique ambience that downtown offers. There is a subtle mix of old historically preserved areas with the newer more modern developments. Historical sites such as the Brown Palace Hotel and Union Station compliment downtown's character with their established presence, while newer developments such as The Pavilions contribute to downtown's fast paced urban lifestyle.

The organization of Downtown is somewhat dispersed and spread out. The main districts consist of Upper, Central, and Lower Downtown. Throughout these districts there is an assortment of mixed uses. Upper Downtown is predominantly made up of hotels and municipal buildings, such as The World Trade Center, The Capital, The Court House, and H.U.D. In addition, there are some office buildings and retail uses. Central Downtown is more mixed use, and is made up of mostly commercial retail/office, and some residential. Lower Downtown (LoDo) is made up of mostly mixed use retail/residential, with an assortment of restaurants, bars, and clubs. LoDo includes some of Denver's major transportation hubs, such as Union Station and Market Street Station.

Within Denver's Downtown, there are certain pockets of activity that are easily identifiable. The Southwestern edge of downtown houses Denver's Performing Arts Center and Convention Center, which serve as popular entertainment venues. A few blocks away, the Sixteenth Street Mall provides shopping, as well as entertainment. A lunchtime crowd is more likely to frequent Writer's Square, with its' small shops and restaurants, while neighboring Larimer Square attracts both day and night activity.

These centers of activity support downtown's vibrant energy, and contribute to the unique urban character that makes Downtown Denver what it is. There are many people who seek the excitement that downtown Denver's urban lifestyle offers, and are willing to pay for it. Recent years have shown substantial increases in Downtown Denver's residential development. With more people moving downtown, there is a need for more flats, lofts, apartments, and other housing accommodations. This growth trend calls for an expansive vision plan.

SECTION 2: Development Potential Summary

Within the Downtown Denver focus area there are a number of vacant and undeveloped parcels. Our build-out scenario was based on the scale and nature of each parcel, the location of each parcel and its' effects on the surrounding environment, and the development opportunities for each parcel. In our analysis, we found that the vacant parcels were dispersed throughout the focus area in no particular order. There were a number of vacant parcels that bordered other vacant parcels, and could be combined into one parcel.

The most significant clusters of parcels occurred along the East side of the focus area (along Broadway, Lincoln, 18th and Califronia, 18th and Welton, 18th and Glenarm, 16th and Cleaveland) and along the South side (between Welton and Court on 15th, 14th, and 13th). The total number of combined parcels on the East side of the focus area was 15 and on the South side was 9. Most of the parcels in the East side cluster were substantial in size as well. The largest of them was parcel #73, which measured 66,638 square feet. The close proximity of vacant parcels in these areas could be beneficial in

future development plans given the proper building usage. This would allow for conforming building usage, which would offset the random dispersion of vacant parcels throughout the focus area. The current placement of parking lots and vacant parcels has created somewhat of a “Swiss Cheese” effect on the overall cohesiveness of the area.

Large surface parking lots scattered throughout downtown breakup the block patterns and take away from the compactness of a true urban environment. It is important to address the compactness of a downtown because it is directly related to pedestrian mobility and accessibility. For example, on the East side of the focus area (mentioned above) there are vacant parcels (parking lots) between most of the buildings. This kind of layout interferes with the spatial relationships between buildings, and discourages pedestrian activity. Along 14th Street there are also a number of vacant parcels that detract from the streets’ building continuity and fluidity. This type of layout is incongruent with a downtown urban image.

The sporadic placement of vacant lots throughout the focus area allows for future development opportunities. Developing these parcels could create a more connected and unified Downtown Denver. In regards to the East side cluster of vacant parcels, some future development plans may consider building residential units and other housing accommodations. This could help build up the residential community on the bordering edge of downtown, as well as provide housing accommodations for visitors. The future plans for Downtown Denver should address residential/hotel, office, retail, and mixed use development with equal emphasis. A functional downtown urban environment requires a diverse array of uses evenly dispersed throughout the area.

SECTION 3: Proposed Buildout Scenario Description

The general development theme behind our buildout scenario was: “The Urban Village”. We focused on the growing downtown community, and ways to create a tight knit urban living environment. One of the first issues we dealt with was the impact that vacant parcels had on the compactness of the focus area. The gaps of vacant parcels spread throughout the focus area broke up the blocks’ building forms and made the downtown less pedestrian friendly. People are less inclined to walk in a downtown when there is an increased distance between activities. “Dead spaces”, such as uninteresting parking lots and vacant buildings take away from the over all aesthetics of a downtown and discourages people from walking in those areas (Robertson, 2).

Pedestrian circulation is vital to the success of an urban living environment. The “urban village” theme centers on the concept of “live, work, and play”. For this concept to thrive, it is imperative to have a downtown that encourages and promotes walkability. In addition, there must be a diverse array of building uses spread throughout the area to create a more varied and mixed urban fabric.

There was no strategic organization of our buildout developments for the most part. The different uses such as retail, office, residential, and hotel were evenly dispersed throughout the study area, in an attempt to create a more interesting and diverse downtown. However, on the Eastern edge of the focus area, along Lincoln and Broadway, we opted to develop more hotels and residential buildings. The reason for this is because we felt that this area would serve as a stable location to buildup the residential community. We chose to develop mainly residential dwellings and hotels here because its’ location was furthest from the heart of downtown where all of the busy activity takes place. Here, people would be in walking distance from central and lower downtown, yet they would not have to live in the central hub of downtown’s activity. Housing in this area would also accommodate the people attending events at Pepsi Center, Coors field, Invesco Stadium, The Convention Center, and The Performing Arts Center. In addition, the hotels in this area would be able to cater to “out-of-towners” visiting municipal offices on business, and tourists who would prefer to stay close to all of the action, but not directly in the core of downtown.

We chose parcel #73 for one of our hotel sites, because it was the largest parcel in that section of the focus area, and because it was conveniently located off of three major streets (Colfax, Lincoln and Broadway). This site was also located directly across from the Capital and Civic Center Park. Placing the hotel across from these two landmarks could possibly draw in more clientele because of its' popular and well known location. Also, this hotel could be considered a prominent gateway to central downtown.

We chose vacant parcels #71, #8, and #74-#18 (combined parcel) for three additional hotel sites. All three sites were located further up on Broadway and Lincoln, in the Northeast corner of the focus area. Their convenient locations would make them more accessible to guests, and would have the potential to bring in business off of Lincoln and Broadway. These three hotels would be somewhat smaller in size, and would probably be quieter as well. They would be more likely to accommodate the people who want easy access to downtown, yet seek a more relaxed and low-key setting.

Implementing additional housing (residential and hotels) in Denver's downtown would have the potential to stabilize and enrich the community in many ways. "Adding to the downtown housing stock provides patrons for downtown businesses, makes working downtown more appealing, adds activity to downtown streets on evenings and weekends, and creates a greater sense of security" (Robertson, 8). In order for there to be a balance within the downtown community, there must be an even distribution of residential (housing and hotels) and commercial (retail and office) uses to support each other. We addressed this issue by spreading out our building uses and creating more variation throughout the focus area.

Despite the current market, our group decided to incorporate a reasonable number of office developments into the focus area as well. We did not base our buildout scenario on current trends because we were under the impression that the assignment did not require us to do so. We also felt that an "urban village" must be comprised of all of the following ingredients: office, retail, residential, and hotels. In our presentation, one of the problems we were confronted with was the amount of office developments that we had added to the focus area. We responded with the argument that an influx of residents would mean an influx of business, and therefore an influx of offices. These offices would "also support downtown revitalization by serving as feeders to other stores and

restaurants” (Robertson 6). In many cases, inner-city, urban living appeals to young working professionals who need to be close to their jobs. With this said, our buildout scenario attempts to provide the proper amount of development for living, working, and playing.

We dispersed most of our office developments throughout Central and Upper Downtown. We chose these locations for office development because they were not as close to the entertainment oriented areas like LoDo and The Sixteenth Street Mall. In addition, office buildings in these areas would be easier to access by car, because of their convenient location near main roads. However, they would still be accessible by pedestrians as well. There are five office developments flanking the East and West sides of Broadway, and three more along Fifteenth Street. Both the Broadway offices and the Fifteenth Street offices have nearby residential/hotel accommodations for employees seeking convenient housing.

The rest of our developments were residential and mixed use (office/residential). These were predominantly scattered throughout the Central and Lower Downtown area, with the understanding that more people are drawn towards the excitement of living in the vortex of activity. We incorporated some mixed use (office/residential) along: 18th and Champa; 16th and Curtis; 15th and Welton; and 15th and Glenarm. The rest of our residential developments were strewn throughout Downtown's main corridor, flanking the Sixteenth Street Mall on both sides. We also incorporated ground floor retail into all of our residential developments in order to conform to Downtown's urban fabric. The “urban village” is based on the concept of community living within an urban environment. We attempted to bring this concept to life by implementing more residents in the heart of downtown and other surrounding areas; and adding sufficient commercial retail and office developments to support that community.

The ratios and total numbers for our final buildout scenario were: 4,839,900 square feet of residential development (39%); 376,988 square feet of commercial retail development (3%); 5,746,450 square feet of commercial office development (47%); 1,344,507 square feet of hotel development (11%); and a total of 12,307,844 square feet of development. Our goal was to provide an even distribution of building uses throughout the focus area. In order for an urban community to function properly there must be a balance in building

uses so that they can support each other. The “urban village” theme thrives on the connectedness and codependency of Denver’s downtown community.