Executive Summary

ARAPAHOE SQUARE ZONING + DESIGN STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

This document summarizes a proposal for new zoning and updated design standards/guidelines to apply in the Arapahoe Square neighborhood. It provides a high-level review of the components of the proposed Downtown Arapahoe Square (D-AS) zone districts, as well as key concepts from the proposed updates to the design standards and guidelines (DSG) for Arapahoe Square.

The proposals described in this document reflect agreements reached by the Arapahoe Square Zoning Technical Task Force, an all-volunteer group of diverse stakeholders including residents, property owners, architects and design professionals who met over a 14 month period.

Following an introduction to the proposed zoning and design review system, the executive summary is organized around the desired future conditions in Arapahoe Square that the new zoning and DSG seek to promote. The full text of the proposed zoning and DSG is available on the web at www.DenverGov.org/ArapahoeSquare

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Contact: Abe Barge, Senior City Planner
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See page 13 for information on next steps.
Executive Summary: Arapahoe Square Zoning + Design Standards & Guidelines

Introduction to the Zoning & Design Review System

Arapahoe Square is one of several special neighborhoods in Denver where both base zoning requirements and a parallel design review process, using design standards and guidelines (DSG), help shape compatible, high-quality development. The proposed system will make significant improvements to the existing zoning and design review in Arapahoe Square.

Proposed Zone Districts

Two new form-based zone districts are proposed to replace the existing Downtown Arapahoe Square (D-AS) zone district:

- **Downtown Arapahoe Square 12+ (D-AS-12+)** is proposed for the northeastern part of Arapahoe Square closest to low-scale neighborhoods. It limits most building heights to 8 or 12 stories with a maximum height of about 20 stories as a tall, slender tower (see page 4 for more information on building forms).

- **Downtown Arapahoe Square 20+ (D-AS-20+)** is proposed for the southwestern part of Arapahoe Square closest to the Downtown Core. It limits most building heights to 12 or 20 stories with a maximum height of about 30 stories as a tall, slender tower (see page 4 for more information on building forms).

The D-AS-12+ and D-AS-20+ districts will implement the height and land use objectives of the Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan by allowing for a vibrant mix of uses in buildings that transition in scale from the Downtown Core to neighborhoods at the northeastern edge of Arapahoe Square (see "Building Heights that Transition from Downtown" on page 6 for more information).

**WHAT IS ZONING?**

Zoning includes the basic regulations that shape property development. Zoning regulations are prescriptive and generally quantitative (based on a minimum or maximum numerical dimension). All development projects must meet applicable zoning regulations, which generally include:

- Allowed building locations
- Maximum height
- Minimum or maximum setbacks
- Specific design requirements
- Parking requirements
- Permitted uses

**WHAT IS DESIGN REVIEW?**

Design review complements zoning with a parallel process to ensure high-quality design. Design review is conducted by staff or a separate board using flexible design standards and guidelines (DSG) that provide performance-oriented guidance for context-specific review of development projects. Typical design standards and guidelines topics include:

- Context-sensitive site design
- Building mass & scale
- Façade character and materials
- Streetscape/landscaping

The 2010 Form Based Zoning Code

Denver’s 2010 Zoning Code Update overhauled the city’s outdated zoning code by providing form-based requirements for context-sensitive development. The update revised zoning throughout most of the city, but did not include significant revisions to the format or requirements of the Downtown zone districts.

If adopted, the proposed D-AS-12+ and D-AS-20+ zone districts described at left will be the first Downtown zone districts that use the updated 2010 form-based zoning format.
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Introduction to the Zoning & Design Review System

Proposed Design Review System
The proposed design review system replaces City staff-led design review with a new Arapahoe Square Design Advisory Board composed of design professionals, property owners and residents. The board will be appointed by the Mayor and use extensively updated design standards and guidelines (DSG) to guide their review of new development in Arapahoe Square. The proposed process will work in tandem with the zoning approval process to streamline development review.

Flexibility for Creative Design
The proposed zoning and design review system provides extensive flexibility to promote creative design in Arapahoe Square. Flexible tools include:

- **A variety of building forms** in the proposed zoning allow flexibility for a range of designs while also incentivizing higher design quality. See “A Vibrant Neighborhood with a Mix of Building Forms” on page 4 for more information.
- **Alternatives** in the proposed zoning allow a variety of approaches for meeting build-to, transparency and upper story setback requirements.
- **Percentage-based tools** in the proposed zoning allow flexibility for creatively-design building frontages, facades, upper story setbacks and other features.
- **Intent Statements** in the proposed design standards and guidelines may be used to approve innovative or creative designs that do not meet specific standards or guidelines.
- **Suggested strategies** in the proposed design standards and guidelines list specific approaches that are appropriate to meet the intent of a standard or guideline, but also allow for other innovates or creative approaches.

Alternatives and percentage-based zoning tools allow creative upper story setback designs that meet the intent of the five story “datum line” recommended in the Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan.

THE NORTHEAST DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOODS PLAN
The 2011 Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan provides the policy background for the new Arapahoe Square zoning and DSG. In addition to recommending the form-based zoning study that led to the proposed zoning and DSG, the Plan outlines specific objectives that are embedded in the proposals described in this document, including:

- Maximum building heights
- A five story datum line (upper story setback)
- Point Tower building form
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A Vibrant Neighborhood with a Mix of Building Forms

Building Forms
To promote a vibrant, mixed-use district with a range of building forms, the draft zoning proposes three basic building forms. These building forms will accommodate the density envisioned for Arapahoe Square in the Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan, while also incentivizing buildings that minimize the visibility of structured parking and limit the mass of the tallest building elements.

GENERAL
This building form allows for a wide range of building types with a maximum height of 8 stories in the D-AS-12+ zone district and 12 stories in the D-AS-20+ zone district. Although this form has the lowest maximum height, it allows for the greatest flexibility since there are no requirements regarding parking design or limits on the size of upper story floors.

GENERAL WITH HEIGHT INCENTIVE
The General with Height Incentive building form is identical to the General building form, with one difference: taller heights are allowed in exchange for minimizing the visibility of above-grade parking. If at least 70% of street-facing parking is wrapped with an active use (uses other than parking, including residential and office), or if no above-grade parking is provided at all, the General with Height Incentive form may be used. It allows for buildings as tall as 150 feet in the D-AS-12+ zone district and 250 feet in the D-AS-20+ zone district. The maximum heights are in feet only, with no restriction on the total number of stories.

**General Building Form**: allows for maximum heights of 8 or 12 stories. No restriction on above-grade parking. Accommodates a wide variety of building forms, including row homes.

**General with Height Incentive Building Form**: allows taller maximum heights of approximately 12* or 20* stories. In exchange, no more than 30% of the lot width may have visible structured parking (at least 70% of all structured parking facing the street must be wrapped with another use). Buildings that provide no above-grade structured parking may also use the height incentive.

*Approximate maximum stories. The height limit for the General with Height Incentive building form is expressed in feet only, which may allow for additional stories.

A Vibrant Neighborhood with a Mix of Building Forms

ABOVE-GRADE STRUCTURED PARKING
An important goal of the zoning and DSG for Arapahoe Square is to minimize the visibility of structured parking. Tools to accomplish this objective include:

» Two building forms that incentivize wrapped parking and below-grade parking

» Restrictions on parking at the street level (see “Street Level Uses” on page 7)

» Design standards to ensure quality design that integrates with the building’s architecture where above grade parking is visible (see “Structured Parking” on page 11)

A Vibrant Neighborhood with a Mix of Building Forms
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A Vibrant Neighborhood with a Mix of Building Forms

POINT TOWER

This building form is recommended for Arapahoe Square in the Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan. It allows for significant height in slender tower forms that reduce visual mass and preserve sky exposure from the pedestrian realm. Point Towers may reach as tall as 250 feet in the D-AS-12+ zone district and 375 feet in the D-AS-20+ zone district, with no restriction on the total number of stories. The Point Tower form requires a maximum floor plate of 10,000 square feet above 5 stories/70 feet. This ensures a narrow tower form above the base of the building.

As with the General with Height Incentive building form, requirements to minimize above-grade parking apply to Point Towers. Buildings must wrap at least 70% of exposed parking structures, or provide no above grade parking.

Point Tower Building Form: buildings may be as tall as 250-375 feet under this building form. Above the 5th story/70 feet, the floor plate is limited to a maximum of 10,000 square feet. This slender, tall form accommodates the density envisioned for Arapahoe Square while minimizing overall building mass.

An example of a point tower in Portland, Oregon.
A major goal of the new zoning and design standards and guidelines is to accomplish a more appropriate height transition between the Downtown Core and neighborhoods adjacent to Arapahoe Square.

**Zone District Mapping**

The mapping of the two proposed zone districts summarized on page 2 creates a height transition between the Downtown core and the low-density residential neighborhood on the northern edge of Arapahoe Square. This height transition is recommended in the *Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan*. As illustrated on the map below, the major height transition occurs mid-block between 21st and 22nd Streets, with lower heights allowed to the northwest, as seen in the image below.

**Transitions to Historic Districts**

Arapahoe Square is surrounded by three historic districts -- Ballpark to the northwest, Clements to the southeast, and Curtis Park to the northeast, across from Park Avenue. All three districts are lower in scale than Arapahoe Square. Transitions along the historic edges are very important, especially adjacent to Clements and Curtis Park, which are lower-density residential neighborhoods. The proposed design standards and guidelines promote sensitive transitions to these areas with standards and guidelines for high-quality facades on all sides of the building and increased use of masonry. See more about transitions to historic districts under “Historic Assets” on page 13.

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*Zone district mapping:* Building heights step down moving from the Downtown Core toward Curtis Park, with the primary height transition occurring between 21st and 22nd Streets.
A key goal for the future of Arapahoe Square is to create a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly district. The proposed zoning and design standards/guidelines promote pedestrian-oriented design in a variety of ways.

Street Level Design

BUILDING PLACEMENT
Building placement close to the sidewalk creates an interesting edge for pedestrians and prevents surface parking from fronting the public realm. Consistent with other mixed use districts in Denver, the proposed zoning includes a “build-to” requirement for buildings to be within 0-10 feet of the front property line for at least 70% of the frontage. As described in “Context Sensitive Design” on page 13, buildings may be located further from the sidewalk edge on some streets to create room for enhanced setbacks and open space.

STREET LEVEL TRANSPARENCY
Transparency requirements ensure a significant number of glass windows and doors at the street level so that pedestrians can easily see into buildings and enjoy viewing active uses inside the building as they pass by.

FACADE DESIGN AT THE STREET LEVEL
The proposed design standards and guidelines promote a variety of tools to encourage pedestrian-friendly street level design, such as:

• Human scale articulation, including bay windows and recessed entries
• Pedestrian-oriented features such as awnings and canopies
• Building entrances that are connected to the sidewalk, clearly visible to the pedestrian, and oriented to the sidewalk or open spaces

Street Level Uses
Uses that detract from a vibrant pedestrian experience, such as parking garages and mini-storage, are not allowed for the majority of the building’s street level frontage. For smaller lots, there is flexibility to place these uses at the street level if certain design requirements are met, including tall floor-to-floor heights so that the street level could be converted to a more active, pedestrian-friendly use in the future.
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A Pedestrian-Oriented Neighborhood

Open Space/Enhanced Setbacks
Privately-owned open space, where thoughtfully designed and easily accessible to the public, contributes to a vibrant pedestrian experience. To encourage street-facing open spaces and enhanced setbacks (areas where the building is set back to accommodate amenities such as cafes), the proposed zoning allows for exceptions to the build-to requirement. This enables developments to set the building back further from the sidewalk and create pedestrian-friendly features such as courtyards, plazas, and outdoor cafe seating. The design standards and guidelines require high-quality design of these spaces and encourage them to be activated by uses in the building so that they are safe, attractive places for pedestrians to linger.

Streetscape
The streetscape is the area between the building and the street. It includes the sidewalk, plantings and trees, as well as other amenities such as pedestrian seating. High-quality streetscaping is an important component of a pedestrian-friendly street. The proposed design standards and guidelines include guidelines that encourage new development to provide a variety of quality streetscape elements, including:

- Appropriately spaced street trees to provide shade and buffer pedestrians from the street
- Distinctive paving patterns to help designate the pedestrian zone
- Street furniture and lighting that are designed to create safe, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes
A Pedestrian-Oriented Neighborhood

Signs
Signage can have a significant impact on the pedestrian experience. The proposed design standards and guidelines promote high-quality, durable signs that are scaled and oriented to the pedestrian. They also encourage signs that are appropriately integrated into the architecture of the building, thereby contributing to positive, human scale design.

On-Site Parking Requirements
Because Arapahoe Square is envisioned to be an urban, pedestrian-focused district with significant multi-modal transportation options, the proposed zoning does not require new development to provide a minimum number of off-street parking spaces for vehicles. This is the same approach to regulating on-site parking in most of the Downtown area. While private development is likely to provide significant on-site parking based on market demand, a flexible approach to parking requirements encourages creative parking solutions such as central parking structures and developments that provide on-site spaces for car share vehicles.

Pedestrian-Friendly Uses
To advance the vision for a truly urban neighborhood that is focused on the pedestrian, the proposed zoning will not allow uses that detract from the quality of the pedestrian realm. For example, new stand-alone parking lots and drive-through uses will not be allowed. There are also significant limitations on the auto-services that are allowed, including tire repair shops and auto sales, such as requiring them to be fully enclosed and limiting their presence along the street.
Quality, Human Scale  Design that Promotes a Sense of Place

The Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan calls for enhancing urban design within Arapahoe Square. The proposed new regulations, especially the design standards and guidelines, advance a new design vision for the neighborhood. The focus is on human scale architecture and creative, innovative design that creates a unique sense of place.

Massing and Articulation
Design techniques that break down the mass of large buildings are an important tool to promote quality, human scale design. The proposed design standards and guidelines require developments with street frontages over 125 feet to incorporate elements such as changes in material and variations in the plane of the facade. These techniques help to break the facade into smaller, human scale components. They also promote variety and visual interest for the pedestrian. As with all design standards and guidelines, flexibility may be granted for creative designs that are consistent with overall intent statements.

Upper Story Setbacks
The Northeast Downtown Neighborhoods Plan calls for balancing the height and density recommended for Arapahoe Square with pedestrian-friendly design. In particular, the plan recommends an upper story building setback (or “Datum”), which will help to minimize the impact of taller buildings on the pedestrian realm. The proposed zoning implements this recommendation by requiring an upper story setback along most streets. The setback, which must be a minimum of 10 feet in depth, may occur anywhere from two to five stories in height. To allow for design flexibility and creativity, up to 35% of the building’s frontage on each street is not required to be set back.

Recognizing the unique character of key streets in Arapahoe Square, the upper story setback requirement varies on important corridors such as 20th Street, Park Avenue West, 21st Street, and Broadway. See more under “Key Streets” on page 12.

Transparency
As mentioned in “Street Level Design” on page 7, the proposed zoning requires a minimum percentage of glass windows and doors along the street level. The design standards and guidelines also promote transparency above the street level. This promotes visually interesting facades and the placement of active uses along the street.
Materials
The proposed design standards and guidelines promote high-quality, visually interesting facades by requiring durable materials, as well as variety in materials, for all street-facing facades. A wide range of materials are allowed, and innovative, creative materials are encouraged. The importance of quality materials for visible alley-facing facades is also addressed.

Structured Parking
A major goal of the proposed regulations is to minimize the presence of structured parking, which is not an active, pedestrian-friendly use, along the street. As mentioned in “Building Forms” on page 4, the proposed zoning incentivizes building forms that wrap above grade parking, or provide all parking below grade.

Where parking is exposed to the street, the proposed design standards and guidelines promote quality design and cohesive integration of the structured parking into the rest of the building’s design. This includes techniques such as:

- Using materials and articulation patterns that are similar to other, non-parking portions of the building
- Creating patterns of openings in the parking structure that reflect the minimum transparency for non-parking facades
- Aligning openings in the parking garage with windows in the upper stories of the building
- Encouraging fully enclosed, ventilated garages

The proposed design standards and guidelines promote high-quality, visually interesting facades by requiring durable materials, as well as variety in materials, for all street-facing facades.
Context Sensitive Design

Arapahoe Square is a diverse neighborhood with a variety of contexts and character. The proposed regulations promote context sensitive design that responds to the unique characteristics of a specific site or street.

**Key Streets**

The proposed regulations recognize the importance of several corridors, each with their own unique character, throughout Arapahoe Square. Below is a summary of these key streets and examples of how the regulations respond to their special characteristics.

**21ST STREET**

This important corridor is planned to be the community gathering space for Arapahoe Square. A recent urban design plan for 21st Street reinforces the vision of the street as a high-quality public space with focus on pedestrian and bicycle travel. The proposed regulations further this vision by allowing buildings to be set back further from the sidewalk to make room for open space, requiring 100% of the street frontage to have an upper story setback above the fifth floor (with flexibility for alternative setback designs) and encouraging the identification of key gateway corners with signature building elements.

**20TH STREET AND BROADWAY**

20th Street is the border between Arapahoe Square and the Central Business District. It is envisioned to have a more urban character common to the Downtown Core. Broadway is a wide arterial that cuts diagonally through Arapahoe Square. North of 20th, Broadway is envisioned as a Grand Boulevard in the city’s adopted plans with a high-quality streetscape and pedestrian realm. The proposed regulations encourage a strong, urban edge along these streets and also emphasize the quality of street level designs.

**ARAPAHOE AND CURTIS STREETS**

Both of these streets provide an important pedestrian connection between the Central Business District, Arapahoe Square, and Curtis Park. Arapahoe Street is also an important bike corridor with a protected bike lane. The proposed regulations for these streets include features such as a wider build-to range (to encourage enhanced setbacks and open space) and streetscape features that promote pedestrian activity.
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Context Sensitive Design

PARK AVENUE
This street, at the northeastern edge of Arapahoe Square, is a key transition between Downtown and the Curtis Park neighborhood. Similar to Broadway, this corridor is identified as a Grand Boulevard in the city’s adopted plans, with a strong emphasis on the pedestrian experience. The proposed regulations encourage development of the corridor as a successful transition to Curtis Park by requiring 100% of the street frontage to meet the upper story setback requirement -- with flexibility for alternative setback designs -- and encouraging building design that responds to the character of Curtis Park through tools such as increased use of masonry.

WELTON STREET
Welton Street is an important transit corridor with light rail service that connects Arapahoe Square to downtown and the Five Points Historic Cultural District. It also forms a transition between Arapahoe Square and the Clements Historic District to the southeast. Tools to acknowledge the unique character of Welton include a wide build-to range along the light rail side of the street (in order to accommodate enhanced sidewalk space for pedestrians) and streetscape techniques that help to buffer pedestrians from the light rail, which is located very close to the sidewalk.

Historic Assets
Context sensitive design includes respecting and responding to the historic resources in and around Arapahoe Square. New buildings located adjacent to one of the three historic districts that abut Arapahoe Square -- Ballpark, Clements, and Curtis Park -- will need to follow additional design standards that recognize the importance of the historic district, including:

• Designing facades that face a historic district across an alley (applies to projects on Lawrence, and Welton streets) to incorporate transparency and materials consistent with standards for street-facing facades
• Increasing the amount of masonry on all visible upper story facades
• Utilizing design techniques such as wrapping or screening structured parking adjacent to a contributing structures in an historic district

In addition, the proposed design standards and guidelines encourage the mass and scale of new development to respond to the character of any adjacent historic structure, defined as a Denver Landmark or contributing structure in an historic district.

NEXT STEPS
City staff will seek comments on the February 17 public review draft of the zoning and design standards/guidelines through March 21. Opportunities for comment include:

• Public Open House on March 9
• Scheduled Office Hours for one-on-one discussion

The Arapahoe Square Technical Task Force will consider public comments and provide direction at a meeting in late March. The adoption process is anticipated to begin with a public Planning Board hearing in late April.

Details and locations for upcoming meetings are available at www.DenverGov.org/ArapahoeSquare

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