Meeting Summary - Meeting 2 - Phase 2

Meeting Objectives:
- Recap Meeting #1
- Provide the Task Force with Information on Height, Mass and Key Corridors
- Discussion that Produces Clear Direction (and Agreements-in-Principle when possible) on Maximum Height, the Approach to Upper Story Massing, and Changes to the Basic Form for Specific Corridors and Edges

Task Force Members in Attendance: Brad Boyle, Albus Brooks-District 8, John Desmond, Dick Farley, Patrick Guinness, Amy Harmon, Joe Lear, Jynx Messacar, Joel Noble, Judy Schneider, Chris Smith, Craig Supplee, and Howard Witkin; Not Present: Judy Montero-District 9, Brent Snyder, Tracy Winchester, Bill Windsor

Facilitator: Mike Hughes

CPD Staff: Sarah Showalter, Abe Barge, Analiese Hock, Samantha Suter, Caryn Champine

Observers: Geoff Bennett, Hugh Brown, Maria Cole, Eric Crotty, Lynn Krist, Trina Robino,

I. Staff Presentation: Datum/Upper Story Mass, Maximum Building Height, Key Corridors

See presentation from Meeting 2 for information presented by staff

In response to building height and step-down to Curtis Park and Ballpark, add Clements Historic Neighborhood to the list of neighborhood transitions.

II. Discussion

A. Datum, Pedestrian Scale, Ground-level, Building Base

- The concept of a datum was a significant part of Curtis Park’s support for the plan. The concept was to use a stepback at the datum line to help prevent a long wall of tall buildings.
- The Park Avenue edge is essential; the datum line prevents the sense that Curtis Park is facing a wall all along Park Avenue.
- The plan recommendation to have a strong datum step-back for the entire length of the building frontage, as called for in the plan, was described as too prescriptive by the task force in the last meeting
- The images and ideas for today attempt to find a balance between the plan and the task force’s desire for more flexibility
- Other neighborhoods have a strict datum line where they are trying to respond to the context of the historic or existing form, this is not necessarily the case in Arapahoe Square
- The datum is more about stepping the upper stories back to create a pedestrian-scaled base to the building, not about having a consistent line on every building; the idea is that the pedestrian should not feel overwhelmed by the height/upper stories of the building
- The ground level of the building is key
- Ground-level details – transparency, uses, entrances, etc. are topics for a future meeting
- Some of the goals for the datum could be accomplished through design standards and guidelines. For example, we could encourage a datum through architectural features like a cornice line or change in materials.
- Need to find an answer to the datum; a strong reference point makes sense, but something that isn’t too prescriptive; need to address whether there is a datum line or a stepback at the datum; it’s the prescribed stepback for every building that may be too prescriptive
- A prescribed five-story datum may not make sense if the building is only six stories
- If the datum line is allowed between 2-5 stories, it’s not a hard and fast 5 stories, the proposal would call for the datum to occur at five stories or anywhere below. So a 6 story building could do the datum at 2 stories
- Important to break up the height for the person from the street
- Coming from Curtis Park to downtown, Arapahoe Square needs to be permeable for the pedestrian
- The concerns that led to the hard datum line recommendation in the plan are important, and at the same time there is a down side to having every piece in Arapahoe Square having an unrelenting datum line; when we walk through the city there should be variety
- Allow for special moments so that the datum is not so uniform
- The Park Avenue face as well as how that frontage wraps the corner onto named streets is most important; create an invitation area along Park Ave but also keep it from being too prescriptive
- The form of the buildings in Arapahoe Square along Park should create an invitation zone – we are inviting people into the neighborhood
  - We should question the assumption that comes through in the graphics – that the buildings will all have substantially larger bases with something smaller that sits on top
  - The podium in the examples implies that we are assuming that this is the form for Arapahoe Square
  - In some locations, the upper story and the ground-level should be the same size and the form for the first five stories shouldn’t be different than the form above
  - We need to look closely at the assumptions that produce the big podium with the smaller tower coming out of it

B. **Linking Upper Story Mass Reduction to Façade Length**

- The idea is the right one – using façade length and not allowing a long façade
- A 100-ft maximum façade length with no stepback might break it up more
- Length of façade is more important than the height
- Park Avenue is recognized as a very important transition and an important corridor that the zoning code can treat specifically
- Curtis Park’s acceptance of denser, larger, higher development across Park Ave depends on something that ensures that they aren’t facing a massive wall; the datum can help create that sense by breaking up the density and height
- A 150’ façade length with no stepback may be too much
- If a typical development size is a quarter of the block, using 150’ length of building with no stepback translates to three quarters of the building as an unbroken mass; that feels superficial – not enough mass reduction
- 100’ length of façade with no stepback may be more successful; If a point tower is 100’ by 100’ (equaling 10,000 square feet on each floor), that may be the better reference point than 150’
- Rather than a max façade length in feet, a percentage of the total frontage for each building may be more successful
- Increasing the number of tools that a developer can use to respond to each circumstance will create a more authentic community; the percentage approach is better in that way than prescribed length; the community is a dynamic system and we should maintain the ability for each new project to respond to each project that comes before
- 150 feet of building frontage with no stepback is much too much
- Look at and test 20% of the façade length not stepping back
- Give developers an either/or, a mass reduction or a datum line, to allow for more variety
- Have a percent that is allowed to break the datum line and not step back. Maybe 20-25 percent of the frontage can be at the street, with 75 to 80 percent of the building stepping back
- The irregular makes things special; we need to organize the toolkit as a reflection of the community and what can make it special
- We shouldn’t use only rectangular buildings – we also want curved forms
- The example from the Pearl District has no upper story stepback or mass reduction - the vertical mass is too much
- It’s all about context. Where we have more space to deal with the vertical components – areas with greater ROW width or at intersections – the mass isn’t as problematic
- Maybe 20% of the total façade length can be at the street with no stepback, while 80% is stepped back
- Some buildings (or parts of buildings) should go straight up from the ground with no stepback, as long as we address the possibility of the oppressive feeling of having a building that is too massive
- The build-to requirements may prevent a break in the building wall – the massing and the build-to are connected – these need to be modulated
- We need to spend a lot of time talking about how to treat and design parking above grade
- We need to talk about parking and open space and the shared infrastructure

C. Amount of Upper Story Mass Reduction – Options A-D

- B and C are in the right range with a certain percent of the façade that does not have to step back; that can work on 200’and 400’ long lots
- Option C is getting light and air to the street, but not talking to the ant walking along the street
- B&C are the right range
- D takes it too far
- B&C, both have opportunities, I would recommend that the higher you go the more open space/less building that you see
- Link height and mass reduction – the higher you go, the narrower the building has to be
- It’s important to remember that we are not designing a building; we are creating the conditions in which the designers will work. The more that we constrain those conditions, the more we constrain the creativity of the designer
- To mandate option C in the zoning ordinance is extreme; what we want are design alternatives
- Being too prescriptive is a problem in this as well; a menu of options makes sense and then tie into the design standards and guidelines
- Consider the Welton corridor, the building envelope was set, but the materials and articulation that occurred was a result of the design review process since it is an historic cultural district with design review
- With Options B&C it seems like we are making it more like a point tower; the lack of step back gives A too much mass
- On the 400’ options between B and C, you can have B and stay in a lower form, or you get C but you can get taller; that allows light to the street and prevents creating wind tunnels
- It might make sense for more bulk and height at intersections and maybe have greater mass reduction at the middle of the block
- Arapahoe Square needs to play the role that was envisioned in the Downtown Area Plan; Option D eliminates development potential that the plan anticipated; D doesn’t fulfill the intention of the plan
- Option A doesn’t work, but we don’t want D either

D. **Maximum Building Height**

- Tie the incentive of going vertical to the placement in relation to the street
- Use height in feet, not stories, in the code
- Maybe we don’t need height limits
- If we have plan support for the heights, the code should follow them – 12 story and 20 story maximums as shown in the plan
- Incentives – they sound good, but they don’t work well
- Using height as an affordable incentive housing is odd, it’s most expensive to go up. Incentives should be for design elements, not affordable housing
- Uncomfortable if we’re trying to game the market by lowering the maximum height that is called for in the plan
- The use and product type dictates the development far more than what is in the zoning, so zoning incentives may not work
- Rental vs. Ownership vs. Office – these are completely different kinds of buildings – with residential, you get narrower buildings; 15,000s.f. is the smallest office, with the reality of the current demand at 30,000s.f., so naturally with residential you get narrower buildings
- We can’t anticipate what the market will pay for, because the market today is different than we could have expected; we need to stay focused on the form and allow for the developers to determine what makes sense economically at the time of development
- Would like to see the opportunity to go to 40 stories on 20th Street
- Why would we want to limit the height?
- We have a plan that sets height limits based on community input; we have choices of talking about lower, but we do not have the opportunity to talk about greater height without a significant effort to re-open the plan
- When the plan was established, it was an entirely different market
- The plan isn’t based on the market conditions at the time of plan adoption
- This is not downtown; it is not appropriate to have downtown-core densities in Arapahoe Square
- We are trying to create a distinctive district. This should not mimic any other area – downtown, Curtis Park, Ball Park, it should be its own area
- Encourage high quality, mixed use, residential, and that may mean smaller floor plates. It may mean more residential than office
- Stay with the heights in the plan - 12 and 20 stories. No reduction in the base height.
- Are we trying to encourage more residential density over office, is the plan that specific?
- The idea was to get residential downtown, this was the best place to do it, so we want to create conditions that encourage residential development; how do we craft incentives that are actually used and not ignored?
- In the ordinance that we have right now, it is very hard to get incentives, because there are only a few variables (such as building height) – it seems like you have to reduce the base height and then increase the height to get what you want
- Maybe it’s an incentive for residential of any kind and not only affordable housing
- We also want office in Arapahoe Square; this could be a place for companies to relocate
- We should implement the plan heights of 12 and 20 unless we can demonstrate that there are incentives that work
- For incentives to work, we need to make the base artificially low. To make the incentive work, we would have to be city that is twice the size
- To test incentives, we would have to start with a low base height
- We should follow the maximum heights in the plan – unless we can test and demonstrate an incentive that would work
- Healthy skepticism about incentives
- Potential incentives need to be tested and we need examples of where it has been used and where it works

E. **Key Corridors**

- 20th, 21st, 22nd, and Park Avenue have a north side and a south side; for solar access, the southwest side should be either lower or more stepped back than the north side in order to get light to the north side of the street; the height map for Arapahoe Square is the opposite, so having a 16 story break (200’ tall) on the north side and then 150’ on the south side would be a much better, then carve and promote where you want the sun and light to come into the street.
- Unfortunately the sun exposure is the opposite of how Arapahoe Square transitions into downtown, with the taller buildings on the south side of the street since downtown is to the south (so it does not translate as well to having lower buildings on the southwest side of the street)
- Maybe there should be more height along Broadway
- Cities are interesting organic places. It would be great to see a hierarchy of streets and more detailed heights than in the plan
- Corridors should be distinct, but perhaps not in the way that they are specified in the options we see tonight; we need to discuss the approach further
- The most complicated sites to develop are the triangular sites created by the Broadway bisect—like 20th Street and Broadway—so give them the most flexibility
- Broadway is a vehicular corridor, it will always be a vehicular corridor, so the idea that buildings should reduce in mass along that street do not make sense
- How are we supposed to decide on the appropriate approach for Broadway since its future is still wide open? The plan didn’t settle the question of Broadway’s future—there is an option for a road diet on Broadway to make it more pedestrian friendly. Maybe that will happen one day. How do we know?
- Leave it more open like a blank canvas so that in a future date it could become more restrictive
- It would be difficult to make the zoning more restrictive later
- The image of Highland Park with tall buildings and a small walkway is a good one
- There is support in much of the task force for no mass reduction along Broadway
- We need to add other corridors—to address the sight lines into the city, such as Curtis Street; these should be on the list with the other corridors for different treatment
- We should do something different on the edge of the historic districts
- We should consider all of named streets that connect from the Curtis Park neighborhood into downtown
- Whatever the basic forms are, there should be variation along specific corridors
- View corridors from the neighborhood towards downtown are important
- What is important is how much building you have to walk past, before there is a change in the building

III. Conclusions and Next Steps

Next Meeting – April 30 – Stout Street Clinic (2130 Stout), Education Room – 3-6 p.m.