

East Area Plan

Frequently Asked Questions



What is the East Area Plan?

The East Area Plan will be a long-term community vision for the Hale, Montclair, East Colfax, and South Park Hill neighborhoods that will help inform city decision-making in the area over the next twenty years. The plan will help guide change to benefit the community and ensure it reflects community priorities. The plan, which will be reviewed and voted on by City Council, will be the final product resulting from a multi-year public process driven by input from residents, local business and property owners, neighborhood groups and other stakeholders.

Because area plans are intended to supplement Denver’s Comprehensive Plan 2040, the East Area Plan will also guide how citywide goals and priorities are implemented at the neighborhood level.

Community input is essential to each step of the planning process. Since this plan process started in 2017, the city has...

- Hosted 6 community workshops
- Circulated 3 rounds of surveys online and in-person
- Facilitated 14 focus groups
- Attended 45+ community events and neighborhood meetings in the East Area
- Led 21 Steering Committee meetings
- Held 3 office hour sessions for in-person Q&A.

We’ve used this community input to create the draft vision, and with your help, we are currently refining that vision into a series of proposed recommendations to achieve the vision. The recommendations will eventually become a draft plan, which will be brought to Planning Board for approval and City Council for adoption.

What is the long-term vision for the East Area?

The vision for the East Area includes:

- More support for local businesses
- Prevent displacement of existing residents
- More affordable housing to support a diverse community
- Slower vehicle traffic speeds
- More convenient and safer walking, rolling, biking and public transportation (“transit”)
- Strategically directing growth to locations near planned high-capacity transit hubs to better manage traffic and allow more residents to benefit from improved transit services
- Preserving valued buildings
- High-quality design of new buildings that is compatible with neighborhood character
- Additional public open space, a larger and healthier tree canopy, and a green approach to stormwater management

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What is the East Area Plan Steering Committee?

In July 2017, Councilmember Chris Herndon and former Councilmember Mary Beth Susman convened 14 community members to serve as representatives of the diverse set of stakeholders within the planning area. The committee includes residents, local business owners and associations, property owners, and neighborhood organizations. All Steering Committee members live or work in the East Area. Steering Committee members volunteer their time to attend regular meetings, provide feedback on the public engagement process, help spread the word about the planning process, and help to develop plan content and ideas. They represent a larger group of stakeholders, with a focus on compromise, consensus building, and identifying shared priorities. The members will make a recommendation to City Council regarding plan adoption at the completion of the project.

How will the East Area Plan change existing regulations, such as zoning?

The East Area Plan will not automatically rezone any properties when adopted. Rather, the East Area Plan will include land use recommendations that will inform future updates to zoning rules. Changes to zoning rules would include a follow-up community process and council approval. Similarly, any property owner who wanted to rezone their property following adoption of the plan would have to apply and participate in the City's standard rezoning process, including opportunities for community feedback and additional Council approval.

How does the East Area Plan relate to the Colfax Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project? Why plan now when BRT may not occur for several years?

The East Area Plan is being closely coordinated with Colfax Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), but they are separate projects and at different stages of approval. The Colfax BRT was approved by voters and received \$55 million in funding as part of 2017's general obligation bond election. The City intends to leverage the \$55M in funding, along with funds from other available sources, to secure additional grant funds to achieve the full vision for the East Colfax BRT. Large scale, federally-funded projects generally follow five major phases: preliminary project development/conceptual design, environmental assessment, design, Right-of-Way acquisition, and construction. The East Colfax BRT is currently in the preliminary project development phase. Based on typical timelines for large scale, federally-funded projects, we estimate it will take 5-8 years from the start of the environmental assessment until construction completion.

Colfax Avenue has the highest bus ridership of any corridor in region. The 15/15L routes combined see seven million annual boardings — over 22,000 per weekday — and weekday ridership is projected to increase to over 50,000 in 2035. The East Area Plan provides an opportunity to plan for the long-term future of the area, ensuring that the community benefits both from its existing transit access and the improvements planned with BRT.

To learn more about Colfax BRT, please visit www.colfaxbrt.org.

What do we already know about how the East Area will evolve over the next 20 years?

Comprehensive Plan 2040 lays out a vision for an inclusive, connected and healthy city over the next 20 years, which guides us to plan well for challenges like additional population growth, climate change, and affordability. Blueprint Denver, the city's land use and transportation plan, addressed these challenges by recommending adding density where it makes the most sense—like along rail stations and high-frequency transit corridors—and creating complete neighborhoods so residents can more easily and safely step out of their cars and take alternate modes of transportation to work and entertainment, reducing congestion and pollution.

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The East Area currently has an estimated 14,661 households today (about 5% of Denver’s total households) and is anticipated to add about 4,200-4,800 households over the next 20 years (about 5% of Denver’s projected growth by 2040). In addition, there are an estimated 11,155 jobs in the East Area today (about 1.5% of Denver’s total jobs) and forecasts project an additional 3,000 jobs by 2040 (about 2% of Denver’s projected job growth). Understanding that growth will occur with or without a neighborhood plan, the East Area Plan will help guide new development in a way that helps achieve community-supported outcomes like affordable housing.

The East Area Plan breaks citywide goals down to specifics, helping to determine what the execution of these goals looks in these neighborhoods and ensuring that it makes sense within the current context. Draft recommendations released in May suggest strategies for height, housing options and the preservation of neighborhood character. These are being updated in response to community feedback we received throughout the summer. The October 29 workshop will present an opportunity to weigh in on the new, updated recommendations.

Why does the East Area need affordable housing?

What we’ve heard from many members of the East community is a desire for their neighborhoods to offer a range of housing options in support of a diverse community, where residents have an opportunity to live in their neighborhoods long-term. Key issues include:

- 4,763 households in East (about 1/3 of all East area households) are considered cost-burdened and spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing
- East is currently short 1,400 units of housing for the area’s lowest-income households. This number is expected to increase as rents continue to rise throughout the city.
- Renters who want to buy will have trouble finding a home until they earn more than \$50,000.
- Only about 800 of the 15,000 housing units in the East Area are guaranteed to be affordable to residents, meaning they have an income restriction in place.

How will allowing 2-4 stories of additional building height along Colfax benefit the community?

Colfax Avenue is currently zoned for 3 and 5 stories in most locations. Draft recommendations released in May initially proposed allowing increased height in key areas as a strategy to achieve community priorities and in consideration of proximity to transit, depth of lots, and transitions to nearby residential neighborhoods. Height above 5 stories was only recommended in small, targeted areas along Colfax at major intersections and transit stops along the 15L bus lines and planned bus rapid transit at Yosemite, Quebec, Krameria, and Colorado, and in some portions of the 9th & Colorado area.

This additional height would **only** be allowed when community benefits are provided, such as affordable housing, open space, community-serving uses, or preservation of existing buildings. The draft recommendations regarding building heights are being revised based on community feedback received this summer and will be available in October for additional input.

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What new housing options are being proposed in East's residential neighborhoods?

One of the draft East Area Plan recommendations released in May proposes allowing homeowners the option of adding one additional primary unit if their existing home is preserved (e.g., converting the upper floor of a two-story home into a separate unit). This would be in addition to the current citywide policy allowing accessory dwelling units (adopted by City Council as part of Blueprint Denver in April 2019). If the home is demolished, the property owner would lose this option. The recommendation is a response to two priorities community members have expressed during the planning process: (1) the desire to provide more diverse and affordable housing options and (2) discouraging scrapes of older homes that reflect the historic character of neighborhoods and are often more affordable options than newer builds.

The draft recommendations also include additional strategies for more housing options integrated with measures to preserve affordability in the East Colfax neighborhood and near Johnson & Wales University.

These draft recommendations are currently being updated to incorporate community feedback. The October 29 workshop and online survey will present an opportunity to weigh-in on updated recommendations.

Is the East Area Plan proposing additional open space?

Yes, the draft recommendations released in May include creating additional parks and open space through both public investment and partnerships with developers and community institutions, such as schools and hospitals.

How will traffic and parking be addressed?

The East Area Plan presents an opportunity to address traffic and other challenges associated with development in a way that provides strategies for increased safety and improved mobility options for residents. The draft recommendations presented in May recommend public investment in over 30 transportation safety, parking and traffic management projects. Recommended improvements include making 13th, 14th, and 17th slower and safer for pedestrians; neighborhood traffic calming improvements (e.g., crosswalks, sidewalks, safer intersections) around schools, churches, and other community destinations; new dedicated bikeways; and incorporating transportation demand management strategies (e.g., bike parking, transit passes for tenants, Uber/Lyft parking, shared parking in commercial areas) into new development to provide residents and visitors viable alternatives to using a car.

Will a new school be needed if we add housing options to the East Area?

Denver Public Schools (DPS) coordinates closely with the City and County of Denver to monitor new development and factor it into 5-year enrollment forecasts. All schools in the East Area have capacity to serve forecasted students living within their enrollment boundaries, and they also continue to have excess capacity to accommodate students who live outside their enrollment boundaries. As DPS monitors development and population trends and their effect on school districts throughout the city and a future capacity shortage is expected of any school in Denver, DPS begins the process of school expansion and/or adding new schools.

Why don't the area plan and neighborhood boundaries align with my neighborhood organization?

Neighborhood organizations set their own boundaries and do not always align with the city's statistical neighborhoods, which were created in the 1970s to follow census tracts for data purposes.

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How were the boundaries of the East Area Plan decided?

With the launch of the Neighborhood Planning Initiative in 2016/2017, neighborhoods were analyzed and then grouped together based on numerous factors that included planning need, character, context, and input from elected leaders. In the case of the East Area, one major factor was the desire to plan both sides of East Colfax Avenue, given its prominence, which was previously included in planning areas as a boundary rather than a central corridor. The four neighborhoods included – South Park Hill, Hale, Montclair, and East Colfax – are based on neighborhood statistical areas.

Will the East Area Plan define new neighborhood boundaries or Council districts?

No, the plan will not establish new neighborhood or Council District boundaries.

My neighborhood already has an adopted area plan. How will the East Area Plan relate to this plan?

An important part of the planning process includes reviewing the previous plans to confirm and carry forward those parts of the vision that still apply while ensuring we have current recommendations and strategies. In the 1990s and early 2000s, many community members invested significant time and effort in neighborhood plans for East Colfax, Park Hill, and portions of Hale. The updated guidance in the new East Area Plan will replace older small area plans within the study area.

Previously adopted plans will still apply outside of the East Area boundary until a future phase of NPI considers these recommendations and provides updated guidance for those areas.

How is the East Area Plan coordinating with the Quebec Street Multimodal Improvement Project?

In September 2019, Denver Public Works officially halted a project that had been assessing the impacts of widening Quebec to four lanes from 13th to 26th Avenues, as it was determined there was the potential for significant impacts to adjacent properties and preliminary cost estimates were well beyond available funding. The project team will be re-engaging residents who live in neighborhoods along Quebec Street as they launch a new effort to implement pedestrian and transit improvements along the corridor. The project team has also been engaging residents through the East Area Plan process. Learn more [here](#).