

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES

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Focus group and public attendees: 25

1. During introductions, attendees were asked to name their favorite Colfax business

- Tattered Cover (3)
- City Park
- Hooked on Colfax
- Family Asian Market
- PS Lounge
- Denver Biscuit Company
- Newhouse Hotel
- Chop Shop
- Bobs Volvo
- Ogden Theatre
- Gyros Place
- Voodoo Doughnuts
- TacoMex
- Phoenician Kabob
- Office Depot
- Sprouts
- Dairy Queen
- Lula Rose Coffee Shop

2. Investment trends in the study area – what’s hot today and the next ten years?

- Adaptive re-use of buildings on Colfax
- Mixed use at BRT stops; office or retail with residential above. (
- Mixed-use at BRT, specifically ground floor retail with residential above – primarily residential above rather than office, but office would be acceptable.
 - Need about \$30 (per sf?) in rent to make office projects feasible.
- Businesses relocating from downtown or Anschutz to Colfax; may be further incentivized by BRT
- Medical office uses (related to National Jewish Health, Rose Medical, etc.)
- Diverse housing, especially elder care facilities that are often overlooked
- Community-serving businesses (fitness, pre-school, restaurants) that are drawn to the local character/experience (and walkability) of Colfax. More social services (homeless shelters, food banks, etc.) so that those in need don’t have to travel all the way downtown; including wrap-around services with housing and mobile services. Homeless and vulnerable populations moving farther and farther out.
- Entertainment; build on the history of the corridor

- Preserve existing entertainment venues to support restaurants and surrounding businesses.
- Restaurants are critical – anchors on the corridor that must be supported.
- Retail in disruption
 - Retail that offers experiences
 - Innovative flex space – e.g. custom orders for food box pick up.
 - Shift from traditional retail towards services and entertainment – need for innovative flex space in the face of emerging technologies.
- Going vertical; not economical to build one story buildings
- Promised a grocery store but didn't receive the store? (Referring to 9th & Colorado development – cost per square foot too high for a grocery retailer).
- Costs for new construction are very high but Colfax has a lot of existing buildings that help keep costs low.

3. Key Colfax challenges and opportunities for investment (including BRT TOD opportunities)?

Opportunities:

- Public spaces with adjacent development, e.g. a plaza at Park Ave and Colfax. Create spaces where people want to hang out and give the area an identity.
- Housing on Colfax of all types: market, workforce, affordable, inclusionary, mixed.
 - Housing is the biggest opportunity on Colfax – not as much as there could be along corridor or adjacent neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are opposed to density, but it could go on Colfax.
- Already a lot of businesses along Colfax but it's not a pleasant place to walk.
- Business mix that serves day-to-day needs (hardware, paint, groceries, etc.). Retail is changing but people still need basic necessities. Colfax needs to serve the day-to-day needs of the nearby residents, otherwise they will drive to other neighborhoods to obtain goods and services.
- Small-format office/retail spaces (within a mixed-use development) that allow for more affordable rent
- Car dealerships and hotels as potential opportunities for redevelopment
- Show developers how much aggregate income is there in adjacent neighborhoods (HHI x Density). Need more information than just median income (# of households, density) to more accurately determine how much money is in the area. (
- Transportation connections into neighborhoods beyond Colfax. Need to make sure the neighborhoods will support Colfax but also that people can get there easily – bikeable, walkable, transit-accessible.
- Make it easier to build on Colfax

Challenges:

- Small, irregular lot sizes
- Lack of space for amenities like patios (:People love to be outside. Lack of patios on Colfax is a major challenge due to narrow ROW and public realm. How do we create more space in order for there to be ample space for everyone? Patios = eyes on the street, increasing actual and perceived safety. Also, we need parking but not EVERY place needs parking).
- Old infrastructure
- Actual/perceived safety. Colfax is unique and gritty but can feel unsafe, especially on the western end of the study area and for women.

- Car dealerships on the far east end are great opportunities for better utilization of the land they are located on. The motels continue to be a deterrent to redevelopment due to the housing crisis as well as perceived crime. What's the dynamic between the car dealerships and the nearby hotels? Need to develop a strategy to address those uses.
- Biggest challenge for Colfax streetcar, the lots were too small to see economic development benefit. Concerns with large developments – are developers buying large chunks of property along Colfax? Where does it stop?
- What happens to properties adjacent to new developments? Are old buildings staying fresh and updated as nearby buildings are renovated or redeveloped?
- Clean up Colfax (litter, dirt, debris)
- Uncomfortable to walk on Colfax between businesses
- Code requirements on change of use is very onerous – from a financial and time perspective
 - No proportionality of requirements hurts the smaller property owners
 - Sometimes it's more expensive to bring an old building up to code than it is to build a new building
 - Restaurant operator in Park Hill operates out of a muffler shop that changed its use. This prompted a 20-page document for improvements and dedications (such as the alley and sidewalks, tree lawns, dedicated to Denver), fixing drainage and ADA issues. It was about \$300,000 in additional costs on a \$900,000 renovation. No proportionality between large and small projects when uses change. They were able to fight some of the changes, but it took 6-7 months, cost tons of money, and now the restaurant operator is in debt due to the requirements.
 - It's not just the cost, but the time and ability required to navigate the City's red tape and bureaucracy.
 - Particular challenge for business owners whose first language is not English
- Variations in zoning of adjacent properties makes land assembly difficult, e.g. MS-3 next to MS-5 next to MS-8. We need a uniform zoning so that people who own multiple adjacent lots can build a cohesive building(s). There wasn't enough forethought when Colfax was zoned.
- MS-3 should go away all together, not realistic for development on Colfax.
- Why is it necessary to build up to the height allowances? Because the land is so expensive, and you need a return on the investment. It's not economically feasible to build 1-2 story buildings and banks won't finance projects that won't deliver enough of a return.
- Parking requirements (e.g. parking minimums still apply to "Main Street" zoning districts).
 - Parking requirements (minimums) are what is driving the development (or lack of development) along Colfax. Fix the requirements.
- A few families own a lot of properties but also fragmented ownership.
 - Some people own numerous parcels and are holding it rather than developing it.
- Legacy owners can get complacent; immune from competition
- Legacy buildings important to the community; can't take down
- Ground floor activation requirement can be costly to design. 75% active ground floor activation requirements are expensive.
- Requirements for getting bank financing
- Restrictions that would make it difficult to offer smaller first floor office/retail spaces
- Impact on adjacent properties

4. Challenges and opportunities to retaining community-serving businesses?

- Legacy vs. community serving?
 - Potential to divide legacy businesses (such as Pete's) and community-serving businesses. Multigenerational owners, women-owned, POC-owned, etc. What are some ways we can define these businesses? How do we define which businesses we want to keep?
 - Which businesses are eligible for additional assistance?
 - How do we define which businesses need to be preserved, and how do we help those business owners navigate the City's processes?
 - What are the community-serving businesses that Colfax doesn't have that it needs to have?
 - If Colfax becomes too hot, vulnerable businesses will be at risk. Prioritizing new development or protecting existing businesses?
- Competition and complacency. There hasn't been enough new investment or new businesses that cause the existing businesses to compete or adapt.
 - There is a danger in protecting some businesses because they can become immune to competition.
- Rent assistance/ rent control
- Corner store businesses can't pay market rates; and are sometimes the only source of groceries for the neighborhood
- Additional support to navigate City services on behalf of smaller businesses
- New development that incorporates existing businesses
- Competing goals between wanting new development and wanting to save current businesses
- Small lots are more suitable for bars and restaurants, but the neighborhood still needs other community-serving businesses like grocery.
- Shells and Sauce as an example of a lengthy, costly renovation (including a change of building use) that has become an extremely profitable endeavor
- Danforth in Toronto as a more mature Colfax
- The City needs to understand the impacts of the BRT construction on the businesses along Colfax.

5. Beyond retail, what are primary employment opportunities?

- Shared space commercial building; co-working
 - Potential for renting smaller retail/commercial space. Requirements (bathrooms, etc.) make it difficult to break commercial properties into smaller spaces that would be more profitable for the property owners and more affordable (due to the smaller footprint) for the business owners.