EAST AREA PLAN
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS: LAND USE AND BUILT FORM
OCTOBER 2019
WHAT’S THE COMMUNITY’S VISION FOR LAND USE AND BUILT FORM IN EAST?

In 2040, the East area is home to a multi-cultural yet cohesive community living together in high quality, well-preserved neighborhoods. Pedestrian friendly streetscapes, open spaces, and charming neighborhood commercial destinations help neighbors meet and get to know each other, resulting in a close-knit, small town feel. Colfax Avenue has retained its unique, gritty character while evolving into a community destination and a gateway that celebrates the recent arrivals who've come to call the East Area home. Renovated shopfront buildings, adaptively-reused motels, and distinctive neon signs intermingle with new mixed-income and mixed-use, multi-story buildings along the iconic street. New development on Colfax Avenue and Colorado Boulevard, along with some smaller infill of housing such as duplexes and backyard cottages within residential areas, has been thoughtfully designed to be compatible with the historic character of surrounding neighborhoods and the additional units have helped ease the severe housing shortage of decades past. As a result, each neighborhood has a diverse mix of residents, including many seniors who have been able to “age in place” by downsizing to smaller, more affordable homes without leaving the families, friends, and neighborhoods they cherish. The easy access to high capacity transit, along with essentials such as groceries, childcare, housewares, and pharmacies, has reduced car traffic and maintained the quiet, residential feel of residential areas. Colfax Avenue is the community’s vibrant main street, even in the evenings when its lively storefronts and wide, well-lit sidewalks are filled with families pushing strollers and seniors chatting on the numerous patios and benches. Blocks along Colfax that used to feel unsafe at night are now bustling with teenagers and young adults who love hanging out in the small plazas where there are always things to do, from multi-cultural markets, food trucks, games, art installations and concerts, to quieter areas where students use the free high-speed internet to study.
LAND USE AND BUILT FORM CONCEPTS

**Enhanced Design Quality Area**
An area where additional standards are recommended in order to better align new construction with community goals. Requirements can include guidelines for bulk, massing, building materials, signage, streetscape, open space, landscaping, improved transitions between commercial and residential, or other elements specific to the vision for an area. See Policy L6.

**Area of Historic Interest**
An Area of Historic Interest is a defined area that has been identified through the neighborhood planning process as needing additional surveying. These areas include unique characteristics that may be worthy of some level of historic preservation. (Photo: Denver Squares, South Park Hill, photo credit: Dick Farley). See Policy L7.

**Commercial Character Building Preservation**
Commercial Character Building Preservation is a concept to preserve buildings that are not currently historically protected, but are desired to be preserved or adaptively reused because they help contribute to the character of a mixed use area. These properties may or may not be eligible for landmark designation. They will be preliminarily identified in the plan, but additional surveying should be completed. See Policy L8.

**Area of Historic Significance**
An Area of Historic Significance is a defined area that has been identified through previous historic surveys. This area, upon further study, may be eligible for landmark preservation or other preservation tools. See Policy L7.

**Active Ground Floor Use Area**
An Active Ground Floor Use Area is a location where uses that enliven and animate the sidewalk are required on the ground floor. These include existing pedestrian-friendly neighborhood destinations, such as former streetcar stations, or areas directly adjacent to a current or planned high capacity transit stations. Activity may be in the form of ground floor retail uses with windows and patio seating along the sidewalk, a small plaza that offers areas for people to sit, play or gather, or other form of activation that has a positive contribution to the surrounding street and sidewalk area. (Photo: Kearney and 22nd, South Park Hill) See Policy L6.

**Historic Landmark/District**
A Historic Landmark is an individual building or property whereas a Historic District is a group of buildings identified by a boundary. Both offer an additional layer of protection intended to preserve their history and character. This includes design review. These include buildings and districts that are on the national register as well as locally designated. (Photo: Home in Montclair Historic District, Montclair) See Policy L7.

**Character Home Preservation**
Character Home Preservation discourages demolition of existing houses by allowing additions to existing structures by modifying certain code requirements, such as modified bulk plane and building coverage, that otherwise may be preventing additions. Additional guidelines for demolition, such as a recycling or reusing building materials is also considered. This concept is one tool that can be used to preserve traditional neighborhood character in addition to others recommended. See Policy L4.
Note: Future place map and descriptions will be updated based on housing options recommendations currently under discussion (see workshop and online survey)
Centers, Corridors and Districts

These serve as community destinations and job centers, providing a mix of uses.

Community Centers provide a balance of residential, employment and dining/shopping uses. Buildings provide a high degree of ground floor activation and front onto either streets or shared public space.

Community Corridors also provide a balance of residential, employment and dining/shopping uses. Buildings have a distinctly linear orientation fronting the primary street (Colfax and Colorado Blvd.) The most activity and shared public space occurs directly adjacent to transit stops.

Campus Districts include education and medical campuses. They are typically dominated by a single, larger institutional use and provide important jobs to the surrounding community. Supporting retail and residential uses may occur within them. Buildings vary greatly in size and scale, depending on the use.

Local Centers and Corridors provide walkable options for dining, amenities, and entertainment. They may also include some residential and office uses or small, shared open space. They are quieter places, nestled within residential neighborhoods. The scale is intimate with a focus on the pedestrian. The public realm is typically defined by buildings with active frontages.

Residential Areas

Areas where the predominant use is residential. Although they are primarily residential, these areas are supported by a variety of embedded uses needed for a complete neighborhood including schools, libraries, recreation and nodes of commercial/retail uses.

High and High-Medium Residential

These places are predominantly multi-unit buildings, and most are located close to Centers, Corridors and Districts.

High Residential provides the highest intensity of residential uses. They may or may not include retail uses, but design treatment and activation of the ground floor along major corridors is important.

High-Medium Residential is predominantly characterized by multi-unit residential structures but also includes a variety of lower-scale residential types. Retail uses may be present on street corners close to centers and corridors.

Low-Medium Residential

These places increase housing options within neighborhoods and serve as transitions to the lower-scale residential places.

Low-Medium Residential (Multi-Unit) includes a mix of residential building forms, including low-scale apartment buildings. These often include small courtyard buildings or “walk-up” apartments (accessed via stairs instead of elevators) and are usually surface parked. They may be mixed in with single and two-unit houses as well. They provide a transition from single and two unit areas to centers and corridors of higher intensity. They are often located near transit.

Low-Medium Residential (Row House) includes a mix of residential building forms, including row homes. They are 2-3 stories and designed to seamlessly fit in with single and two-unit houses. They sometimes include a private or shared garage for parking cars. They provide a transition from centers and corridors to single and two unit places.

Low Residential

These places are predominantly one- and two-unit with ADUs.

Two Unit Residential includes a mix of single- and two-unit homes, including the duplex form or detached in a tandem house form. They often look and feel like a single unit home. Some forms have two entrances that face the street and some have one prominent entrance and one more discreet entrance from a side street or alley.

Single Unit Residential includes more traditional houses that are setback from the street with front and rear yards and occasionally side yards. They usually include a prominent front entrance with a porch or stoop. They often have pitched roofs although some low-sloping roofs exist as well.

Note: Future place map and descriptions will be updated based on housing options recommendations currently under discussion (see workshop and online survey)

See Blueprint Denver for full place descriptions
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community members expressed the desire for a more diverse mix of land uses – particularly adding businesses that serve the neighborhood residents and adding more housing choices.

When asked where growth should be focused, there was strong agreement that Colfax Avenue around transit stops was most appropriate.

“The top amenities for me in the East Area are...”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amenity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Shopping</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Retail &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</table>

Percentage of times selected as a “top 3” amenity in online survey

“What ‘other’ types of housing would you like to see in the East Area?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of votes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Live + Work</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplex</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of votes by neighborhood workshop attendees

RECOMMENDATIONS

L1

Ensure compatible development on institutional sites within neighborhoods.

Institutional uses, such as schools and places of worship, are typically embedded within residential areas and provide key services to surrounding residents. When these uses leave a neighborhood, it can leave a vacant site that has the potential to provide additional neighborhood services and more diverse housing options without displacing existing residents. In addition, new development on existing large campuses should be designed to complement the surrounding neighborhood.

A. In the East area, small vacant institutional sites should be preserved and reused.
   1. Appropriate uses include low-medium residential and low impact neighborhood-serving uses, such as childcare, community meeting space, and non-profit offices.
   2. Design standards should ensure neighborhood compatibility

B. When new development occurs on larger campuses, including the former VA Hospital, Rose Medical Center, National Jewish, and Johnson and Wales University, new public open space, pedestrian connections, and pedestrian-friendly building frontages should be encouraged (See Economy Section for additional detail.)

L2

Encourage shared use and activation of institutional and quasi-public buildings and open space during off-peak times.

Some neighborhoods in the East area lack smaller, neighborhood-scaled open space and community facilities. Allowing shared use of facilities like churches and schools during off-peak hours could provide these community benefits in locations where dedicated facilities would be difficult to provide.

A. Encourage shared use of space on institutional sites by creating shared use agreements. Some examples could include:
   1. Using playgrounds, gymnasiums, and sports facilities for public use during non-school hours. (See Quality of Life recommendations)
   2. Using church parking to accommodate nearby parking needs for adjacent uses.
   3. Using school parking lots for neighborhood events, mobile community gardens or farmer’s markets. (see Mobility recommendations)
   4. Using dedicated areas on school grounds for community gardens.
   5. Encouraging shared use of rooms within these types of buildings for community uses, such as book clubs, arts and crafts, presentations, and adult learning (see Economy recommendations).
“Community benefit” is a term used throughout the draft recommendations. It is most often associated with Land Use Policy L3 which seeks to attain certain valuable community needs when new development occurs. Some examples of “community benefits” for this purpose are listed below:

1. **Affordable Housing** – Comprehensive Plan 2040, Blueprint Denver, and Housing an Inclusive Denver all identify affordable housing as a vital need throughout the city. As described in the draft Economy and Housing recommendations, the East area is in need of 1,400 affordable units for the lowest income residents. Without additional affordable housing, the East area cannot be a complete and inclusive neighborhood.

2. **Saving a Character Building** – “character buildings” are those that add significant value to a neighborhood or corridor. They may or may not be eligible for historic designation, but they are desired to remain in the community because they contribute to the character and history of an area. They also often times are providing affordable commercial or residential space because they are older.

3. **Affordable Commercial Space or Community Serving Use** – new buildings are often more expensive to rent, especially due to current high costs of development. According to community feedback, offering subsidies or smaller spaces to community-based non-profits, local artists, and existing local tenants that might otherwise be displaced or other community-serving commercial enterprises is desired. Adding community-serving uses, such as grocery stores, childcare, senior care, social services – to name a few – is also desired.

4. **Publicly Accessible Open Space** – incorporating publicly accessible open space, such as small pocket parks, courtyards, passages or plazas – beyond what is required by code – helps achieve plan goals for increasing tree canopy, stormwater management, and improving access to parks and open space. These elements can also add value to the development.
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Neighborhood workshops included an exercise that asked which elements of new construction in low residential areas were most important to address. The top four priorities were:

1. MASS & SCALE
2. HEIGHT
3. MATERIALS
4. SIDE SETBACKS

Another correlating concern to new development is that naturally affordable places are being lost through redevelopment. Many single-unit homes are occupied by renters, leaving tenants at risk for displacement. Newer, larger homes are also typically more expensive to purchase. This plan includes several strategies to address housing affordability (see Housing). Design-oriented solutions to address affordability also under discussion (see workshop and survey).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage renovations or additions instead of demolition in residential neighborhoods.

Renovations and additions help preserve neighborhood character by keeping most of the building intact and retaining character-defining features such as brick facades, raised front porches, and other period architectural features. Avoiding demolition can also help preserve mature trees and landscaping and results in less waste.

A. Update regulations in residential zone districts to remove barriers to additions and renovations.
   1. The following should be considered:
      a. Ensure regulations preserve the existing house in exchange for greater flexibility.
      b. Allow penetrations to the bulk plane standard for dormers and cross gables.
      c. Reduce the required separation between the garage and the main house to enable rear additions.
      d. Reduce rear building setbacks to enable rear additions
      e. Allow building coverage exemptions for the full footprint of a detached accessory dwelling unit.
      f. Encourage energy efficient upgrades such as: better insulation techniques (higher R-Values), energy-efficient windows and appliances, and higher-performing HVAC systems.
      g. Encourage green stormwater management techniques, such as green roofs, increasing pervious surfaces, bioswales, and rain barrels.

B. Discourage demolition of homes of a certain age or construction through tools such as requiring deconstruction and recycling of materials during demolition.
RECOMMENDATIONS

L5

Work with neighborhoods to modify zoning standards for new construction to be more consistent with neighborhood character in low residential areas

New construction in low residential areas is sometimes out of context and detracts from neighborhood character due to the mass and scale of new buildings in contrast to older buildings. Modifying zoning requirements such as setbacks and building coverage can help ensure new buildings and additions make good neighbors and fit in with the established character of the surrounding neighborhood.

A. Update zoning regulations to create more contextual standards for massing, scale, and height.
   1. The following should be considered:
      a. Reducing building coverage standards, including exemptions for garages if inconsistent with the established pattern in the neighborhood.
      b. Reducing looming effects and encourage side yards. Consider increasing side setbacks, or a combined minimum setback for both sides and a one side minimum to allow flexibility in meeting the increased standard.
      c. Reducing the length of two-story side walls. Consider a maximum dimension for two-story walls before a change in plane or limit the percentage of a wall plane that can be at the minimum side setback.
      d. Reducing the appearance of building scale and promote compatible roof forms by considering the following:
         i. Set a maximum dimension for a flat or low-sloping roof to discourage out of character 3-story houses
         ii. Modify bulk plane standards to encourage pitched roofs in neighborhoods where it is the traditional roof form.
      iii. Modify bulk plane standards to provide exceptions for cross gables and dormers. This would provide an alternative to flat roofs and accommodate more floor area in a sloped roof form.
      iv. Modifying bulk plane standard to maintain a 1-1.5 story height in the front portion of lots in areas where these heights are prevalent. In exchange, taller building heights in the rear portion of the lot may allow additions while helping to preserve the established scale of the neighborhood at the street.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage high-quality design and character preservation in Centers and Corridors.

With most new growth directed to Centers and Corridors (mixed use areas), new development should advance the vision for high quality design, a diversity of small, locally owned businesses, compatibility with adjacent residential neighborhoods, and preservation of unique, existing commercial buildings that contribute to the East area’s character.

A. Modify regulations to improve design quality in Centers and Corridors.
   1. Primary elements to consider include:
      a. Ground floor design treatment and activation standards
      b. Parking locations and design
      c. Materials
      d. Transitions to lower scale residential and historic districts
      e. Streetscape and open space design
      f. Creative design solutions and flexibility

B. Strengthen standards for ground floor active uses areas
   1. Primary elements to consider include:
      a. Limiting residential units on the ground floor
      b. Discourage parking on the ground floor and upper levels fronting primary streets.

C. Prepare standards and guidelines for sensitive transitions adjacent to low residential areas.
   1. Primary elements to consider include:
      a. Adjusting side setbacks to be more compatible with front setbacks of buildings on side streets.
      b. Increased upper story step-backs.
      c. Four-sided façade treatments and contextual building materials.
      d. Parking and loading location and design.
      e. Ventilation and refuse container location.
      f. Lighting.
      g. Enhanced landscape buffers, including an option to create agreements with adjacent property owners to install enhanced landscaping on their property.
      h. Transitional uses to provide buffers, such as allowing a house adjacent to a restaurant to be converted into a small low-impact office (e.g. a small non-profit) if the residential building is preserved.
      i. Solar energy access.
      j. Balcony and window design to enhance privacy.
      k. Landscaped facades, such as climbing vines, “green screens”, and balcony planters.
Mobilize next steps for preserving historic buildings and neighborhood character in residential areas.

Some portions of the East area have unique architecture and patterns that could benefit from additional character protection, such as Landmark or Conservation Overlay districts. The city’s Discover Denver program surveys neighborhoods to identify buildings or areas that are historically, architecturally or culturally significant to Denver’s history and may warrant such protection.

**A.** For areas identified as an “Area of Historic Significance,” partner with Historic Denver to engage residents on the creation of a historic district.

**B.** Identify additional incentives to encourage property owners to designate, such as:
   - a. Technical assistance writing designation applications
   - b. Additional financial incentives, such as fee reductions
   - c. Alternative preservation tools, such as conservation easements or private covenants

**C.** For areas identified as “Areas of Historic Interest,” encourage Discover Denver to prioritize these areas for the next survey phase and, based on the findings, consider next steps for character preservation (e.g., historic district or conservation overlay).
Reduce regulatory barriers to make it easier to reuse existing buildings that contribute to the character of Colfax and encourage a higher level of preservation for historically significant buildings.

The plan’s vision for the Colfax corridor is to preserve its unique character while allowing it to evolve to better serve the community’s needs. Facilitating the adaptive reuse of existing buildings can help achieve both of these goals, however current regulations make that difficult in some circumstances. Other tools, such as a landmark district, may also be appropriate to accomplish the vision.

A. Establish an Adaptive Reuse Ordinance that reduces existing barriers to reusing structures. Explore the following:
1. Modify standards to be more proportional to the proposed project and site conditions while ensuring consistency with the vision and goals of this plan. Consider the following modifications:
   a. Land dedication requirement for Colfax right-of-way when it would result in a lot being less than 75-feet deep.
   b. Alley access rules.
2. International Existing Building Code provisions, including health, fire, and change of use

B. Evaluate the corridor for historic and cultural significance
1. Initiate a study to determine eligible properties, include Character Buildings in evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT BUILDINGS SHOULD BE PRESERVED?

In the East Area, there is only one historic landmarked structure just off Colfax and there are no historic districts that exist along Colfax today. However, there are quite a few buildings that contribute to the character and history of the corridor that should be encouraged to remain. Buildings Types to consider include:

- **One and Two-Story “Main Street” Storefronts** – these are usually brick construction, although some have been painted. They offer good “form” that is similar to the future vision for Colfax.
- **Older Residential Structures and Storefront Additions** – there are a few older homes that are still residential uses or have converted to commercial. Some have additions to the front yards that bring new storefronts to the street. These buildings contribute to the history and help tell the story of Colfax’s evolution.
- **Motor Court Motels and Googie Architecture** – Motels are clustered along the eastern edge of the study area. Some have the potential to provide quality examples of Googie architecture and have forms and proportions that could facilitate common courtyards

In addition to buildings, a big part of what makes this area of Colfax Avenue unique today is the cultural significance. This area is home to a large immigrant population and has numerous ethnic restaurants.
RECOMMENDATIONS

L9 Repurpose Commercial Alleys that Intersect With Colfax as Pedestrian-Friendly Spaces

Alleys are underutilized public spaces that have the potential to be improved as shared or pedestrian-only spaces and can function as much-needed public open space. They can be activated by adjacent buildings with windows, doors, lighting, benches, café seating and public art. If opened up, they may provide more affordable “back door” commercial spaces for new small businesses.

A. Work with Business Improvement Districts and Arts and Venues to create an “Activate Alleys” program that provides financial or technical assistance to property owners for public art and public realm enhancements.
   1. Identify financial assistance to property owners relocating utilities within alleys that intersect with Colfax.
   2. Modify standards so that improvements over utility easements for amenities like seating, lighting, and public art are encouraged.

B. Where redevelopment occurs along an alley, encourage enhanced design solutions and small commercial spaces to help activate these spaces and make them feel safer.
   1. Include design guidelines for alleys in the guidelines for centers and corridors (see Land Use recommendations).

L10 Amend sign regulations to allow creative solutions to signs that fit the character of Colfax.

Signage along Colfax is part of its history. Allowing more flexibility for signs can help preserve the corridor’s unique character while also benefiting its businesses.

A. Work with the community to identify desirable iconic, vintage features of existing Colfax signs. Features to consider should include blade, roof, illumination, and mural signage.

B. Modify regulations to encourage preservation of existing desirable signage and new signs that reflect Colfax’s unique urban design character.

L11 Discourage low utilization of land and auto-oriented uses near future BRT stations.

Drive-thrus and other small buildings with large parking lots near transit stations are incompatible with this plan’s vision for a vibrant and walkable Colfax corridor. Restricting these types of development will encourage more efficient use of land, ensuring more residents, employees, and business patrons benefit from proximity to transit.

A. Consider modifications to regulations to discourage drive-thrus and encourage multi-story, mixed use development, such as:
   1. Updating limitations on the drive thru building form to include high capacity transit station proximity.
   2. Changing the current minimum height in MS-5 or higher from 24 feet to two stories.