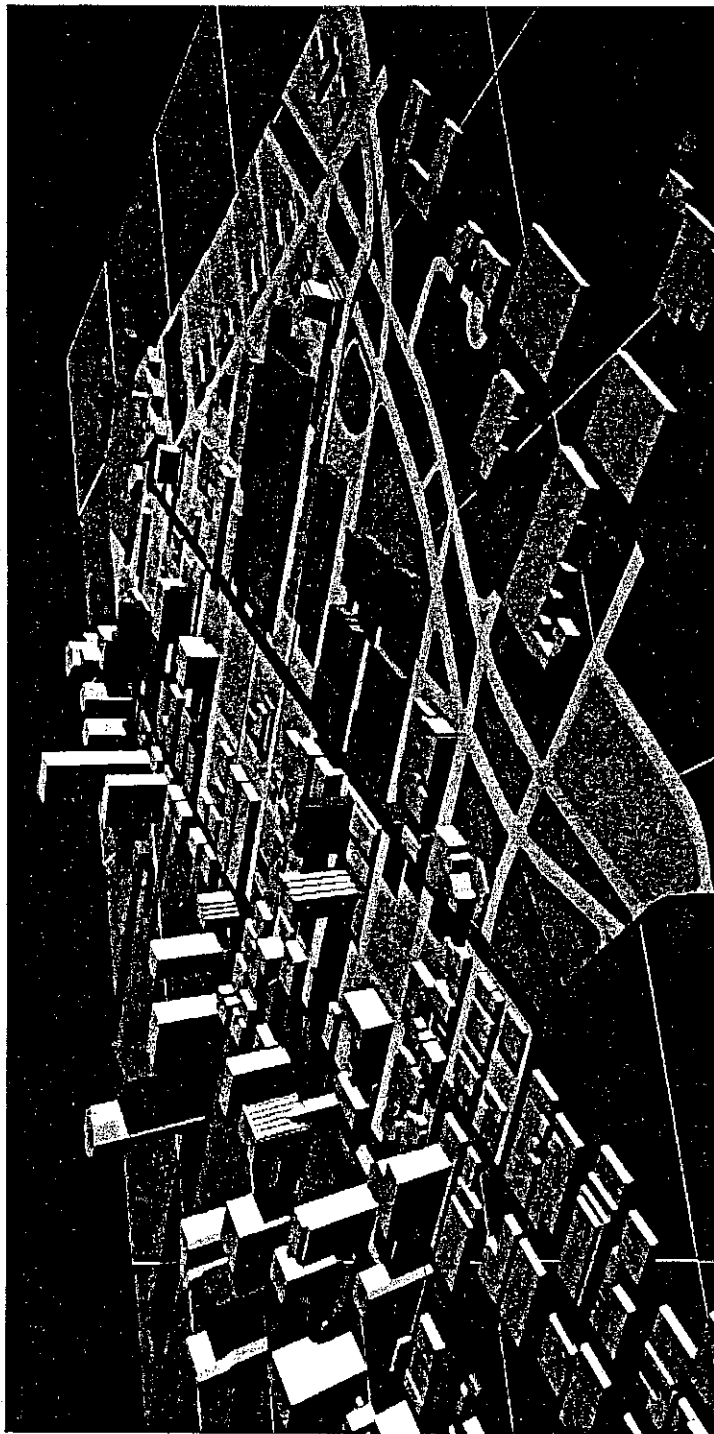


# SILVER TRIANGLE

URBAN DESIGN STUDY



*City of Denver  
Mayor's Sub-Committee  
May 10, 1999*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Introduction

## Background

The City and County of Denver has been considering expansion of the Colorado Convention Complex (CCC), which consists of the Convention Center and Currihan Hall, located in the Silver Triangle area of Downtown Denver. The expansion would roughly

The Task Force divided itself into two Committees: the first to explore the programming and planning of the Convention Center expansion and the second to explore its planning implications in the surrounding Silver Triangle area. The second committee is the Mid-Downtown Plan Committee, chaired by Clark Strickland; it has developed the guiding principles and actions described in this document, with the assistance of RNL Design, urban designers and architects, and Szymanski-Ray, economics consultants.

## Charge to the Committee

The Committee was charged with developing urban design concepts for the Silver Triangle that would provide a vision for the development of this part of Downtown and a fitting context for the expansion of the Convention Center. The Committee asked the consultants to evaluate the urban design, economic and development potentials of the Silver Triangle. The object of this work was not to produce a plan for the Silver Triangle, but to develop a vision for the area, and principles and actions to implement it.

## THE SILVER TRIANGLE

The Silver Triangle area is the portion of Downtown Denver bounded by Speer Boulevard, 16th Street, Colfax Avenue and Lawrence Street. It is surrounded by the rest of Downtown, Lower Downtown, the Golden Triangle and Auraria. While these other areas have developed their own identity, the Silver Triangle's identity as part of Downtown has not been as clearly defined. Ultimately, the Silver Triangle will become an

integral part of the Denver Downtown, and not a separate, distinct district.

double the size of the present 300,000 sq. ft. complex. The Convention Center Expansion Task Force was appointed by the Mayor in January 1998 to assist the City of Denver in making a recommendation about the advisability of the expansion of the CCC.

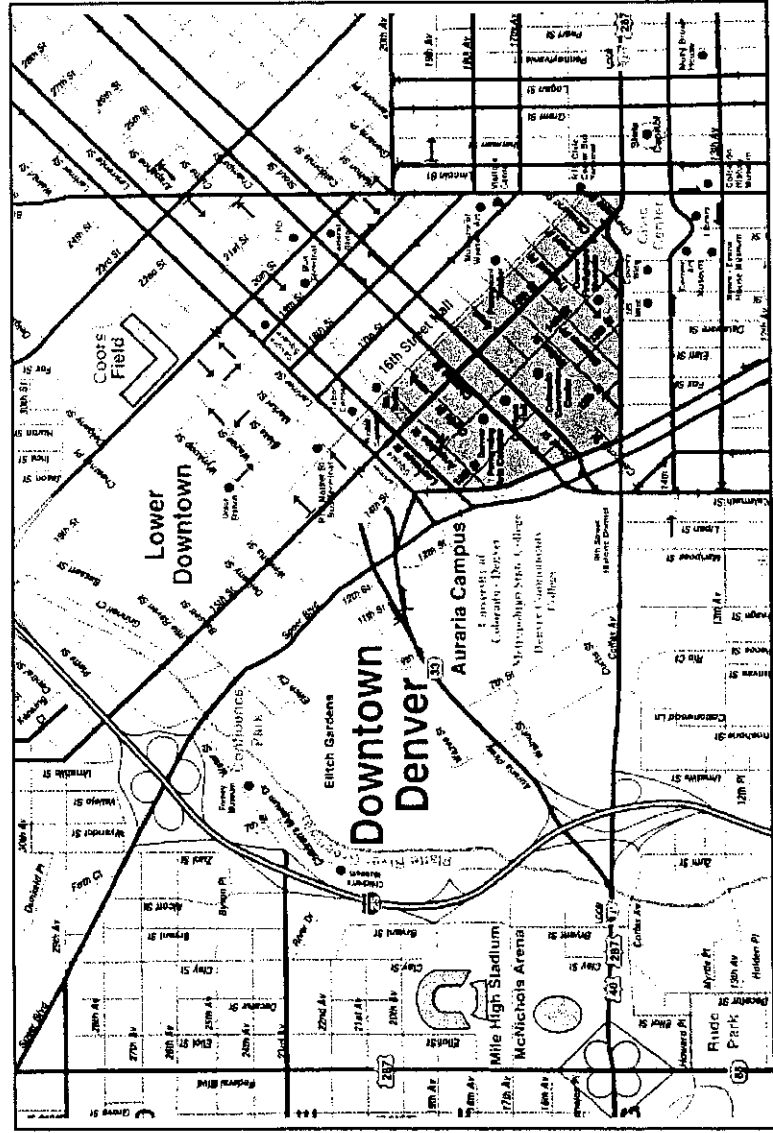


Figure 1: The Silver Triangle Area

## DOWNTOWN ACTIVITIES

The map shows the Downtown attractions related to the Convention Center and the Denver Performing Arts Complex (PLEX). Areas of strong visitor attraction such as the 16th St. Mall and LoDo are shown to have numerous retail stores and restaurants. These areas are particularly lively at night and during special events. The Civic Center, at the opposite end of 14th Street, is the other concentration of cultural and civic facilities that draws visitors. Other nearby destinations include Pavilions, Larimer Square, hotels, government offices, the Denver Athletic Club and the Auraria Campus.

The Silver Triangle's primary attractions are the Performing Arts Complex, and the Colorado Convention Center, both of which have a national and regional draw, with high peak visitor counts. As the map shows, the Convention Center/PLEX area has not generated significant restaurants, hotels or other attractions that cater to these visitors. This is largely due to the effect of the superblock created by the Convention Center. Most Downtown restaurants are located in Lower Downtown, or along the axis of 16th/17th streets. Hotels are located a minimum of 2-3 blocks away from the Convention Center or the PLEX.

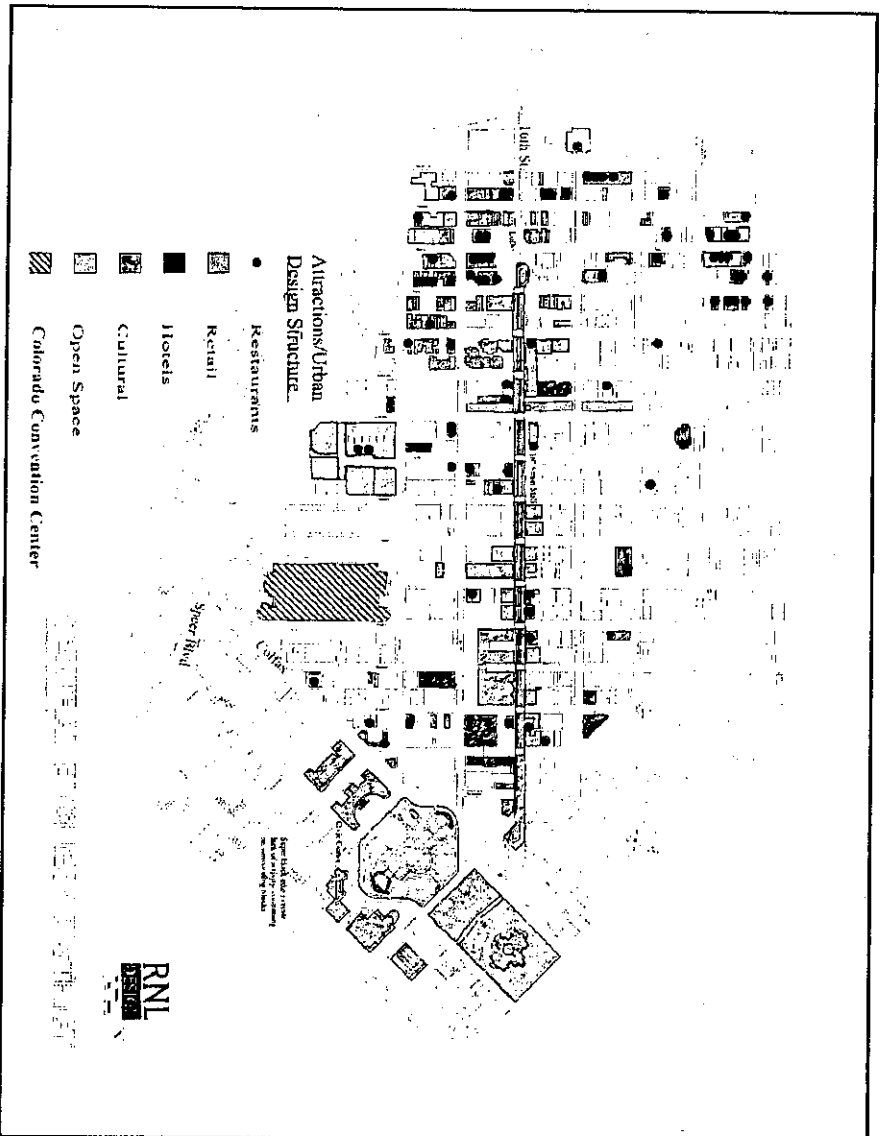


Figure 2: Central Business District

Some new hotel activity is currently being generated on 14th, with the Teatro Hotel and the proposed renovation of the Executive Tower Inn. Aside from the Holiday Inn located at 15th Street and Glenarm Place, these would be the closest hotels to the Convention Center. Otherwise, it is a 2-3 block walk from the Convention Center to any

restaurant, hotel or other attraction, past extensive parking areas, with few pedestrian amenities along the way.



## CONNECTIONS

### 14th Street

Historically, 14th Street has been the location of civic uses such as the Denver Tramway Company and telephone company. It has evolved into having the potential to be a "main street", linking Lower Downtown, the PLEX, the Convention Center and other attractions with the Civic Center. A lower building height limit on the southwest side of 14th Street assures sunlight and preserves mountain views.

### 15th Street

The street is a heavily travelled automobile and bus transit corridor serving as a paired one-way street with both 14th and 17th Streets, which run the opposite direction. It is also a cross-town connection from Colfax Avenue to West 29th Avenue. Since it is also a vehicular connection to the Central Platte Valley and Highlands, it has the character of a movement corridor; but it lacks a pedestrian orientation. It also has less historical identity as a business or retail address, making it more difficult to envision its future character.

### Speer Boulevard

Speer Boulevard serves as a primary gateway to Downtown, and a transition to the Auraria Campus. Its orientation in a diagonal direction along Cherry Creek is a distinct urban design feature. The Cherry

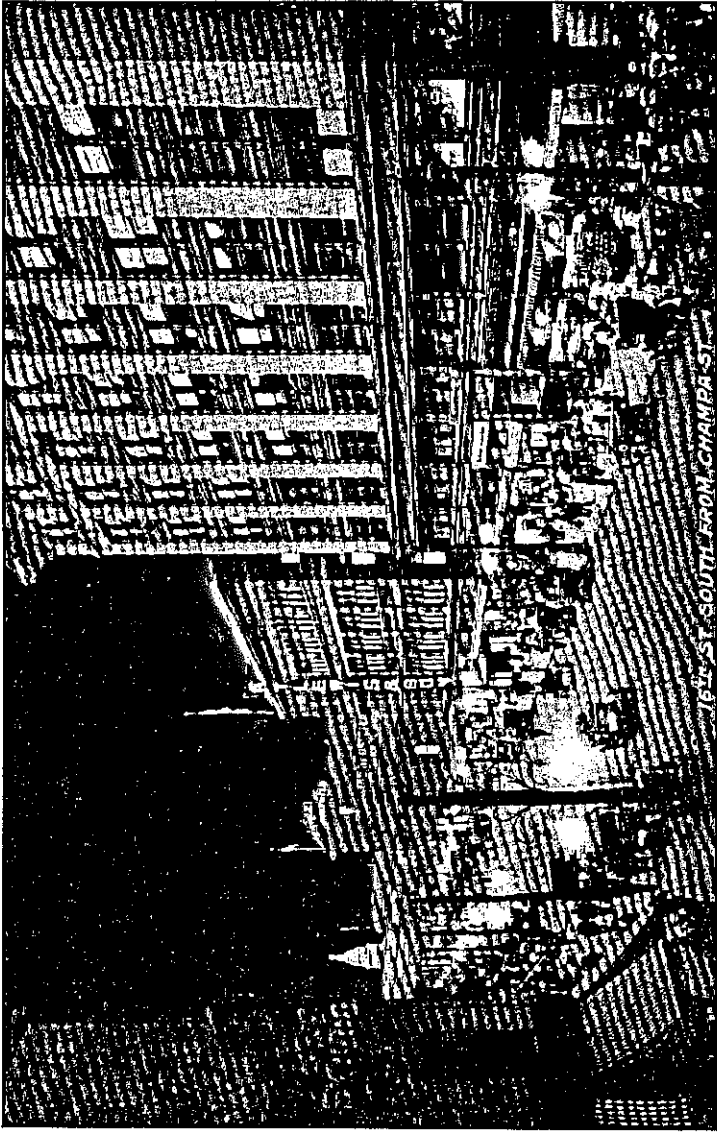


Figure 3: Historic 16th Street View

Creek Bikeway is an active recreational corridor along Speer Boulevard and the Downtown edge of Speer has considerable open space, such as the sculpture park at the PLEX. This historic parkway has a formal landscape design and a strong historical identity.

### Transit & Pedestrian Connections

To be convenient for riders, public transit needs frequent stops. Stops need to be integrated into the streetscape improvements so that adequate amenities

for seating, lighting and trash containers are provided.

The Silver Triangle lacks strong pedestrian interconnections between the Convention Center, the PLEX and other areas with visitor attractions, such as the 16th Street Mall, LoDo and the Civic Center. As a result, there is little incentive to walk along some of these streets because they lack a level of activity that makes the pedestrian feel safe and lack visual interest

## STREET GRID

The map illustrates the extent and continuity of the Downtown street grid. The grid has never been interrupted for private purposes, but was broken for the Convention Center and the PLEX. Multi-block private projects such as the Taber Center and the Pavilions have been developed by bridging streets, rather than closing them. Composed of one-way streets, the grid has provided an easy-to-use access pattern into and around Downtown. Another feature of the street grid are the extensive view from Downtown to the mountains along many of the streets.

The expected growth of Downtown requires that all street access be maintained. Any street closure creates greater confusion, less access and compounds congestion.

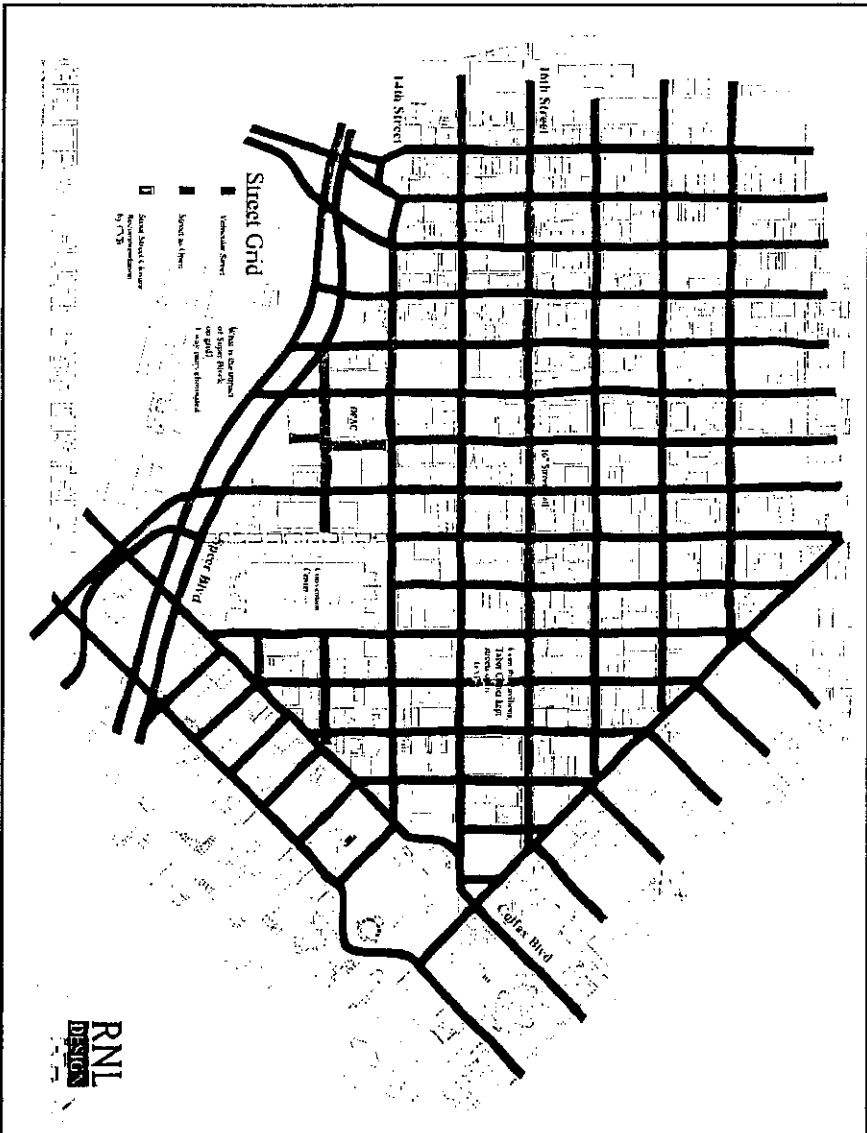
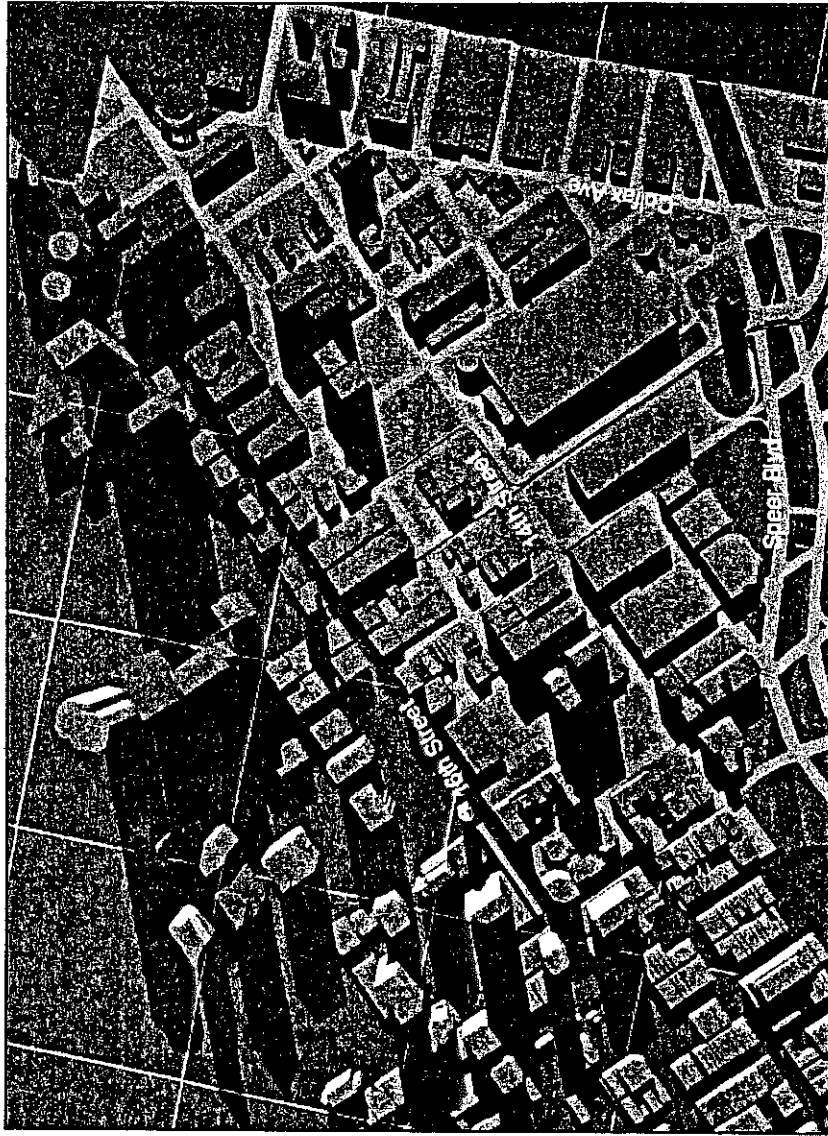


Figure 4: Street Grid

## ***BUILDING COVERAGE***

This view illustrates the building coverage in Downtown, compared to the open space, parking lots and streets. The continuity of building frontages can be clearly seen on many streets, such as 16th Street. On the other hand, many building frontages are missing on 15th and 16th Streets, in the vicinity of the Convention Center. These gaps in the pedestrian experience translate into streets that are uninteresting to walk in the daytime and dangerous-feeling at night.

Another point of interest shown in this view is the large scale of the Convention Center, compared to the smaller buildings on other blocks. Even the PLEX is broken into block-size buildings by an internal walkway system that follows the street grid.



*Figure 5: Overhead View of Silver Triangle*

## PARKING

As new development takes place on surface parking lots in LoDo, Downtown and the Golden Triangle, the parking reservoir for the greater downtown area is reduced. To meet growing parking demands, private parking structures are being constructed, such as the new structures on 16th Street and on California. Attractions like the PLEX have location-specific needs for additional parking at event times, which sometimes overlap with all-day patterns of commuters and business visitors to Downtown.

Recently, several large parking lots have been built in the Central Platte Valley for use by Sports Complex, Coors Field and the Pepsi Center visitors. These more remote parking areas could potentially serve the downtown area. Transit shuttle service would provide access to large numbers of people from these lots to attractions in the Silver Triangle.

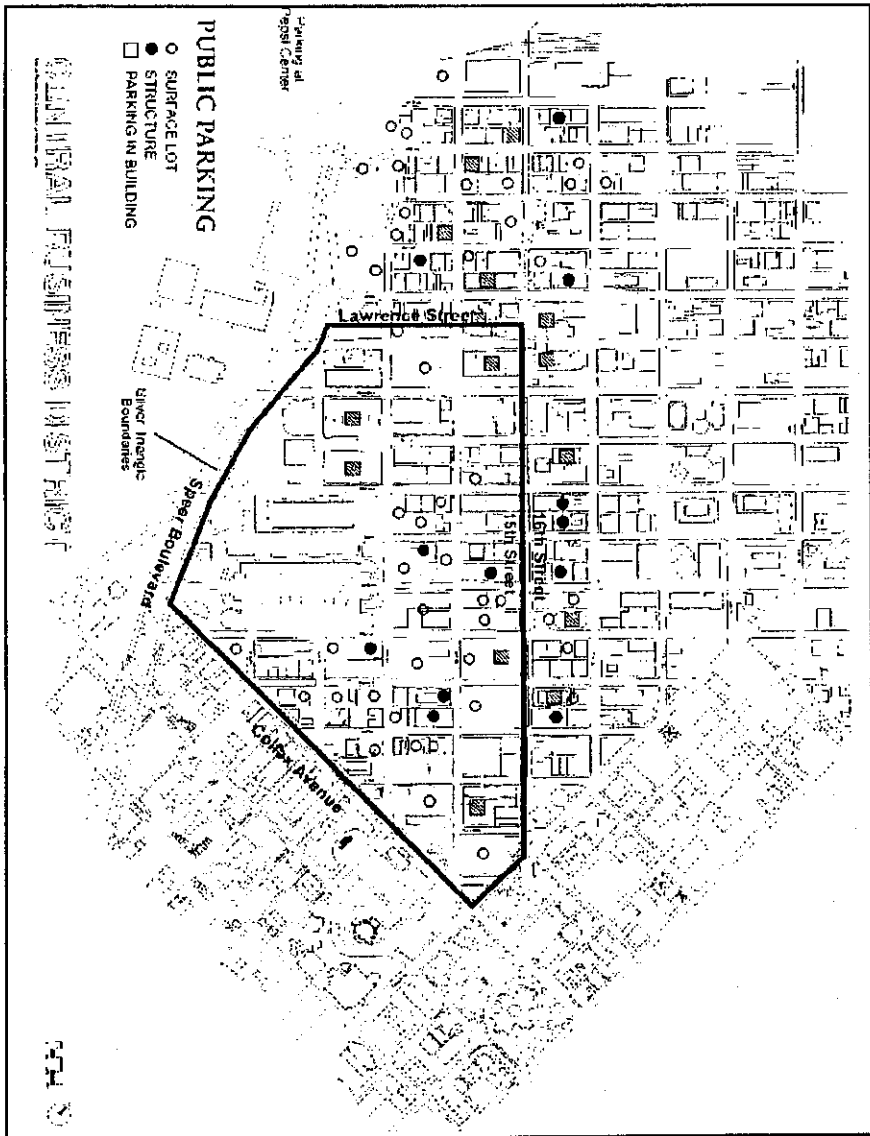
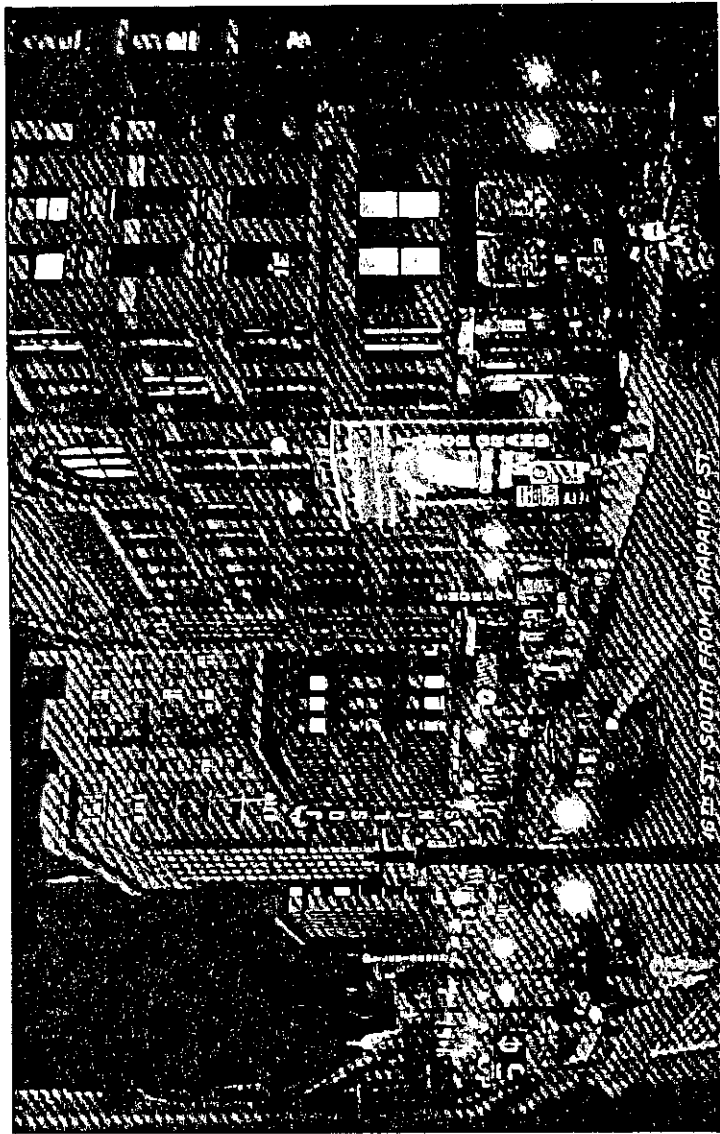


Figure 6: Public Parking

## *HISTORIC RESOURCES*

The rich history of the Silver Triangle creates a unique opportunity to preserve historic structures and integrate themes of the past into future development and improvements. Curtis Street was a brightly lit theatre district, and 14th Street was a tree-lined residential street. Twelve buildings in the Silver Triangle area, as well as Larimer Square are designated landmarks. Fifteen additional buildings in the Silver Triangle have been identified as eligible to be landmarks, but have not yet been designated. Curtis, Champa, Stout, California, Tremont and Cleveland each have at least one historic building, "survivors" that lend identity and a sense of place.



*Figure 7: Historic 16th Street View*

## DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

The Silver Triangle is zoned B-5. This zoning was revised in 1994 and Design Guidelines added to create a more urbane, interesting and pedestrian-friendly environment in Downtown. Many sizeable, sites in the Silver Triangle await development, and sufficient zoning density exists to create substantial new building. In many cases, the "missing teeth" of vacant lots along named streets creates an insecure environment for pedestrians.

Aside from the Convention Center and the PLEX, the area has little positive image or identity and is of mixed quality and intensity. A void of positive activity exists around these two facilities.

The Silver Triangle does not provide enough activity - "not enough city". Restaurants, shops and gathering places in the area, along with office, residential and other attractions are needed to create a viable area to visit and spend time.

As the 3D model illustrates, the continuity of large tracts of undeveloped frontage creates a high development potential, both in allowed height and bulk, along the 14th and 15th Street corridors. The only constraints to development are the limited bulk planes that define the view corridor from the Civic Center

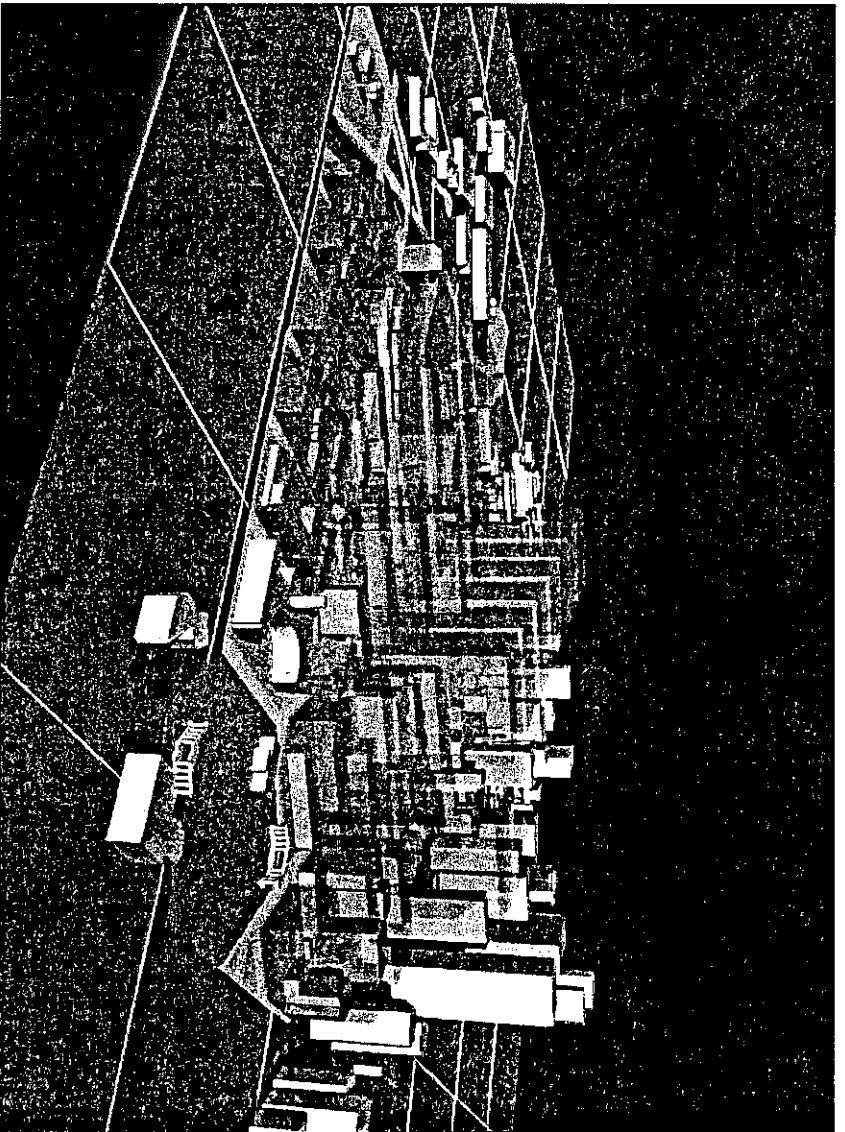


Figure 8: Development Potential

*Although there is no height limit between 15th and 16th Streets, the model shows allowable bulk in the mid downtown area. Base F.A.R. is 10'-0" but with premiums, this can be increased to 17'-0" F.A.R.*

As new development occurs in the Silver Triangle, the ability to activate the streets with retail, restaurants and shops increases. Examples are the back of the Pavilions blocks on 15th Street, where

two sites have been left vacant for later development, and the old Denver Post site, recently cleared for a new hotel project.

## VISION STATEMENTS AND GOALS

The Committee developed three vision statements that are intended to provide the overall direction for the Guiding Principles. These vision statements are as follows:

### LAND USE VISION

The Silver Triangle will become part of the core of downtown by incorporating buildings of a Downtown scale and intensity, including a mix of civic/cultural, hotel, neighborhood support, office, retail/restaurant, residential, open space and parking uses. Ultimately, the name "Silver Triangle" may lose its association with this area, because it will have been absorbed into the greater Downtown development pattern.

The land use diagram shows the structure of Downtown as envisioned with the Silver Triangle performing an essential role as part of the Downtown pattern of land use, circulation and pedestrian amenities.

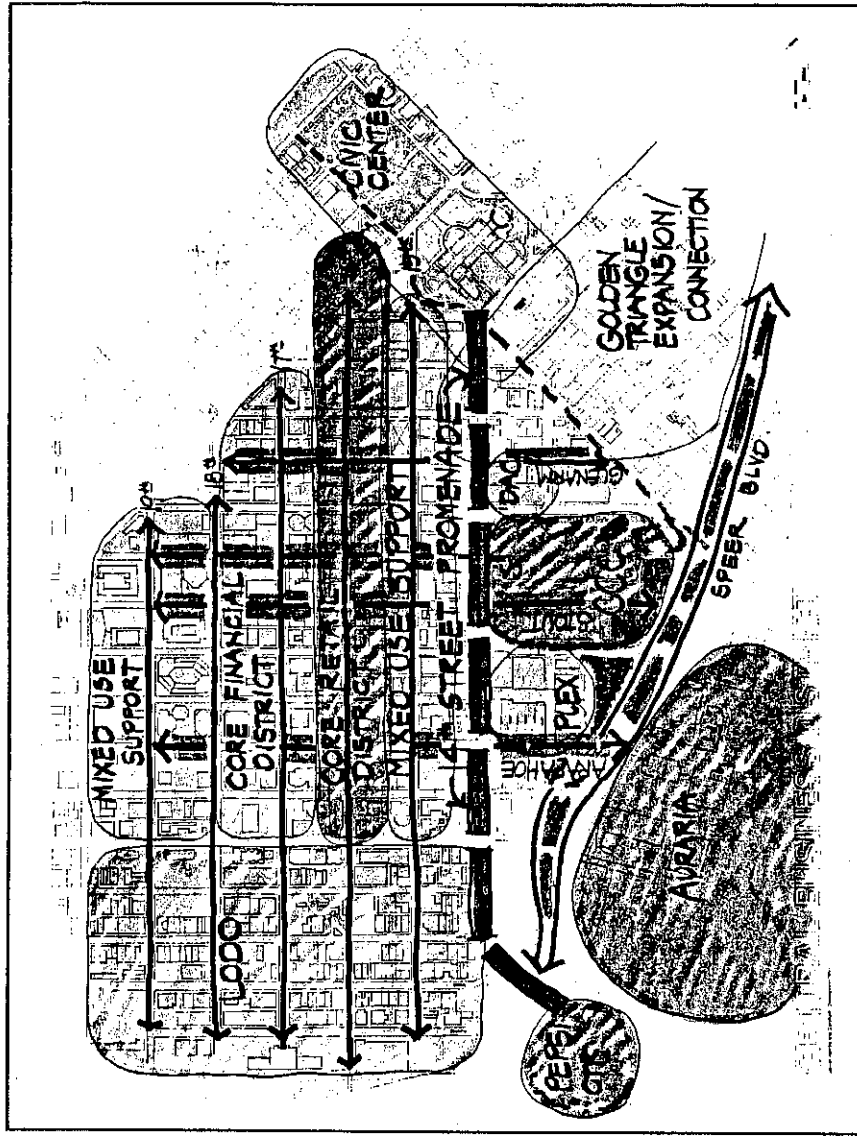


Figure 9: Land Use Vision

## CHARACTER VISION

Residents, local employees, customers, PLEX patrons, conventioners and visitors will enjoy a dense urban area that is active, attractive, and safe for pedestrians and efficient in moving people and vehicles into and through Downtown Denver.

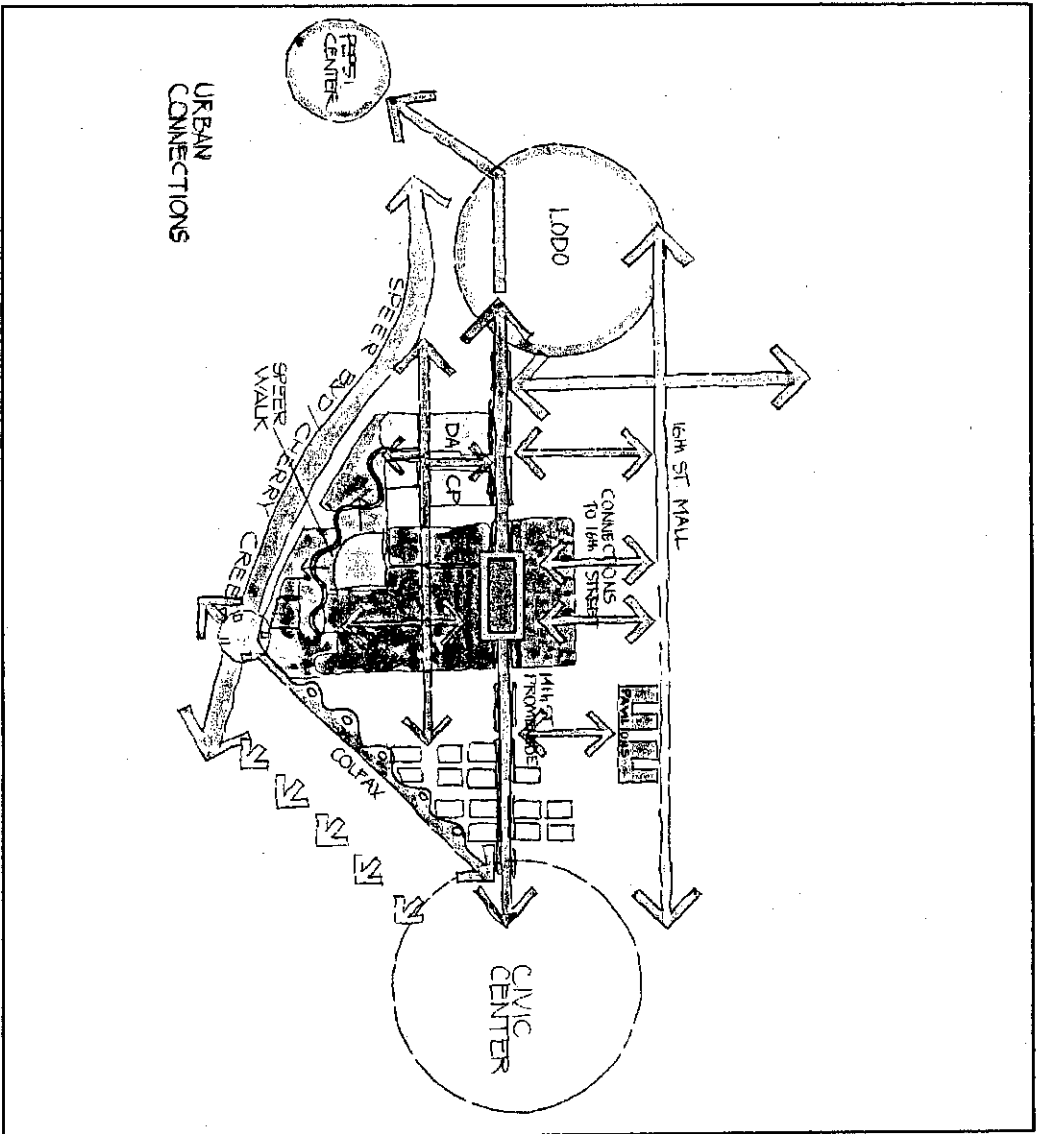


Figure 10: Urban Connections



## STREETSCAPE ENVIRONMENT

The diagram illustrates some of the potential streetscape improvements that would help to make the Silver Triangle an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment, and connect it into the Downtown system. This is only one of many alternative streetscape potentials for the Silver Triangle. Some of its features may be:

- A 14th Street promenade with street trees, special paving and lighting, graphics, and development focused on the street.

- Streetscape Improvements with individual identity on the named streets, to create pedestrian connections between the PLEX and Convention Center and other parts of Downtown.

- Speer Walk - a continuation of the open space in front of the PLEX, for pedestrians and patrons of the PLEX and Convention Center, respecting the green edge of Speer Boulevard.

- Event Center Park - a plaza for special events and gatherings in front of the expanded PLEX. This would make the connection between the Convention Center and the proposed hotel across 14th Street.

- Colfax Parkway Sculpture Parks - The triangular sites formed at Colfax Avenue become sites for environmental sculpture and art, creating a boulevard/parkway along Colfax.

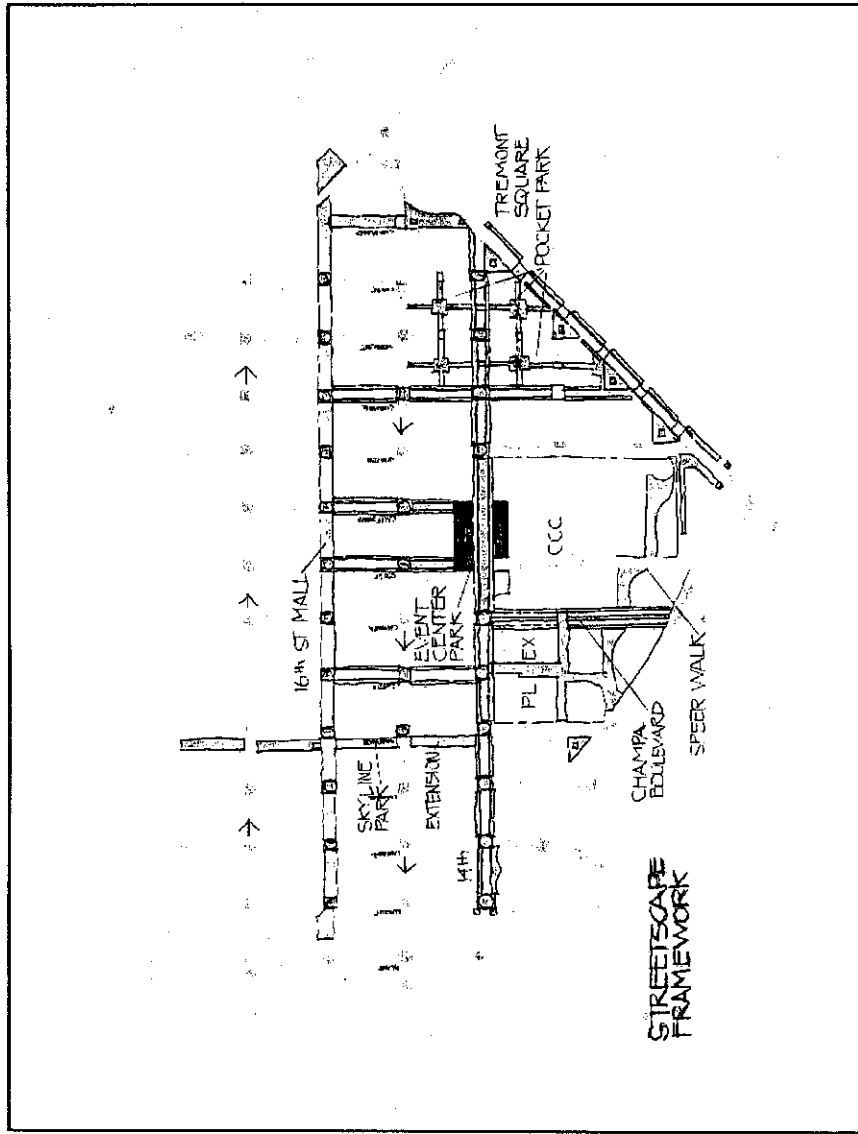


Figure 11: Potential Streetscape Environment

## ECONOMIC VISION

The Silver Triangle will "fill in" with additional business and residential development that enhances the baseline daily economic activity and supports and captures the commercial value of the Convention Center, PLEX and other visitor facilities.

The objective is to change the supplement the "spikes" of Convention Center and PLEX activity with stores, restaurants and other attractions that can draw people into the area every day, creating a constant healthy business environment.

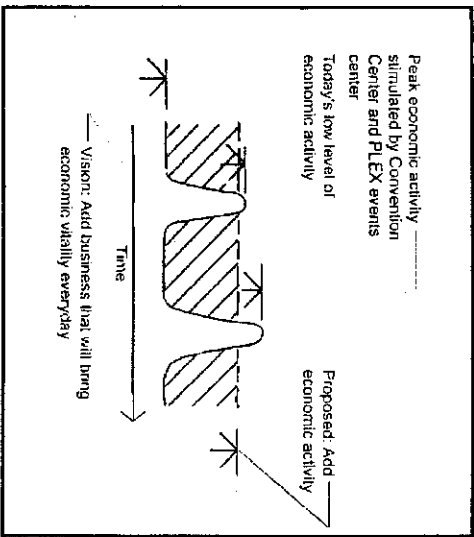


Figure 12: Business Activity Fill-In

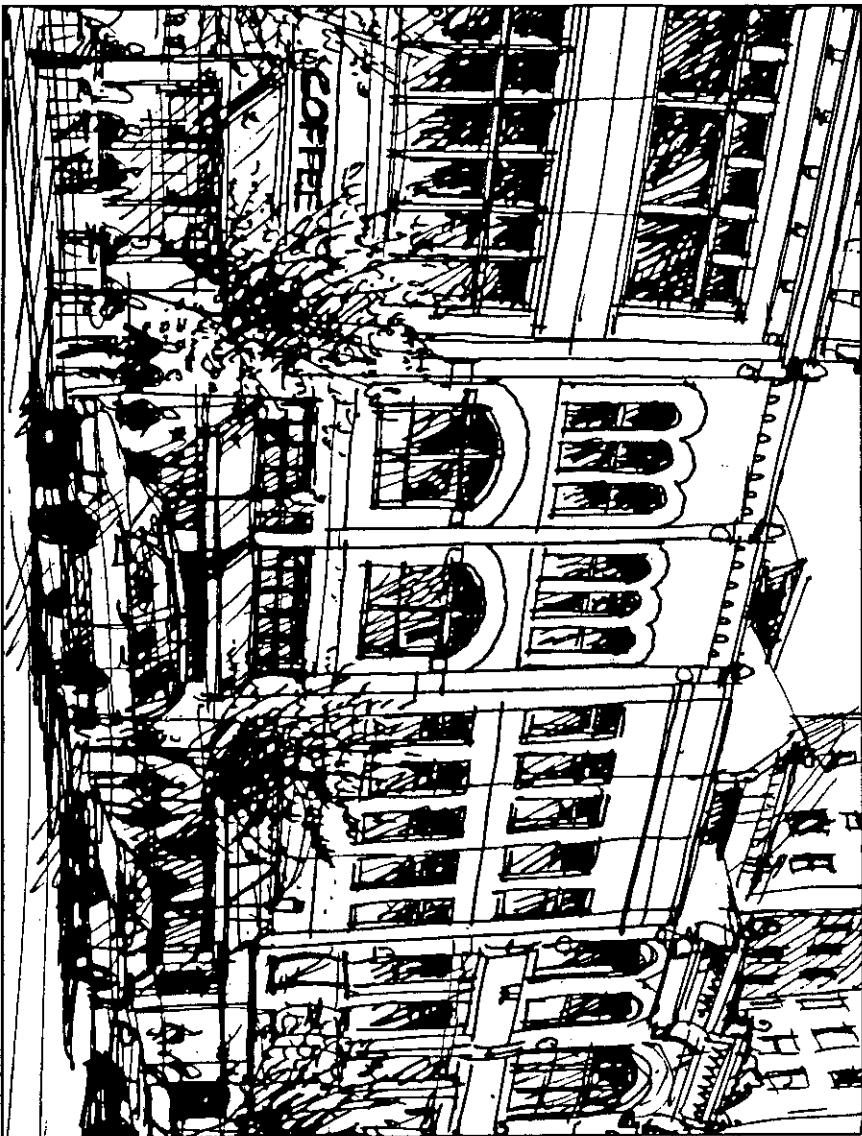


Figure 13: New Silver Triangle Businesses

## *The Guiding Principles*

1. Create a diverse mix of complementary activities-civic/cultural, hotel, neighborhood support, office, retail/restaurant, and residential uses.
2. Generate pedestrian interest and activity on 14th Street.
3. Enhance the commercial viability of 15th Street.
4. Respect the formal landscape edge of Speer Boulevard.  
Open building facades  
Provide development that is visually interactive and accessible
5. Reinforce a pedestrian-friendly environment and open space opportunities.
6. Enhance the designated pedestrian links between 14th and 16th Streets (Glenarm, California, Stout, Champa, Curtis and Arapahoe).
7. Support rehabilitation and reuse of remaining historic buildings.
8. Accommodate vehicular transportation (auto, bus, truck/service and light rail).
9. Respect the existing street grid.
10. Address Downtown parking concerns.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The Committee developed a series of principles that are intended to guide further planning and development in the Silver Triangle. These principles address both public and private actions in the area. The effect of these principles will be to knit the Silver Triangle into Downtown, rather than create a separate district. The principles also address major improvements in the area, such as the expansion of the Colorado Convention Center, and describe how the area surrounding it can be developed to create an inviting, exciting addition to Downtown Denver.

The guiding principles are summarized here and are more fully described and illustrated in the next section.

## **ACTIONS**

Each of the guiding principles needs action steps to implement it. On the following pages some of the implementing actions for each principle are described, with an illustration of the end result of the actions.

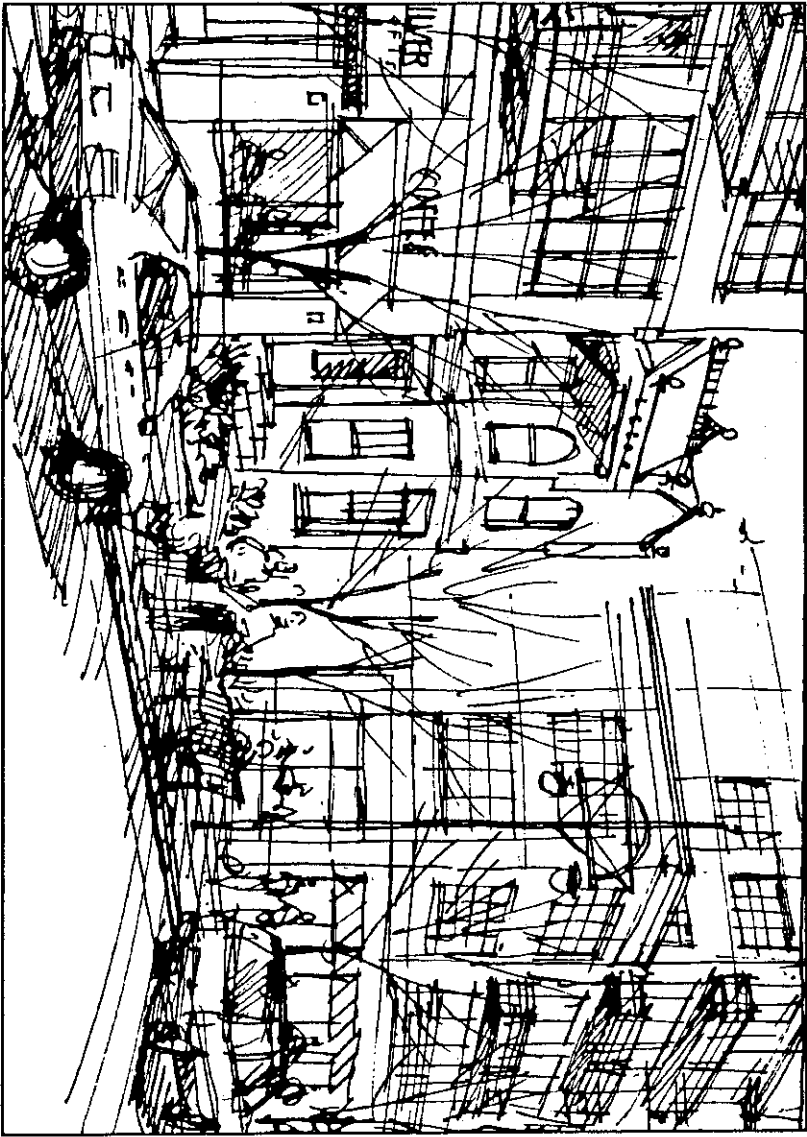
## *Principle 1*

### **Mix of Uses**

Create a diverse mix of complementary activities—civic/cultural, hotel, neighborhood support, office, retail/restaurant, and residential uses.

Add buildings and new uses to integrate the Silver Triangle into the whole of Downtown.

- Develop strategies to encourage small, street-active uses to locate on the ground level of buildings in the Silver Triangle and elsewhere in Downtown.



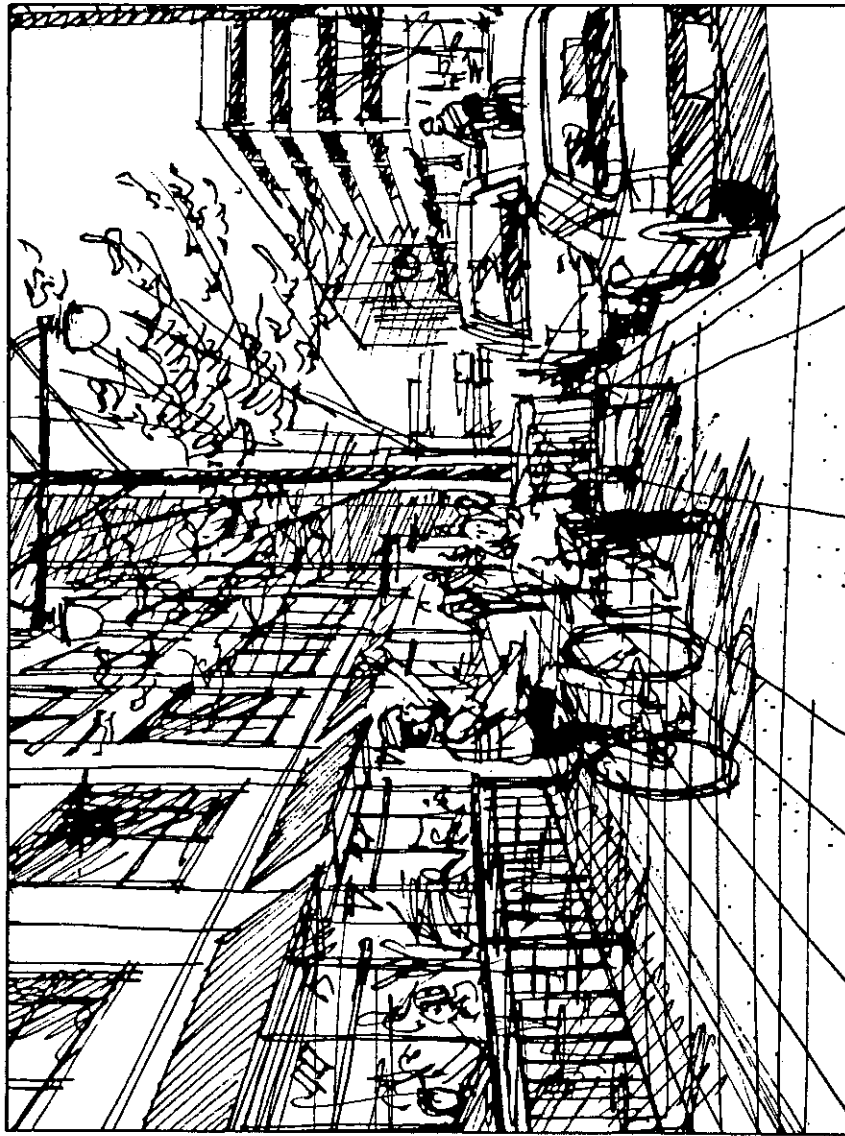
*Figure 14: Mix of Uses*

## *Principle 2*

### **14th Street**

Generate pedestrian interest and activity on 14th Street.

- Use 14th Street as the pedestrian and bike link between the Central Platte Valley and Downtown extending from the new "Bronco Bridge" touch down at the Pepsi Center to the Civic Center.
- Create streetscape amenities that reinforce the pedestrian and bikeway character and define the "edge of the core of cores", a term used by the City Planning office to define the most intense and active part of downtown: between 14th and 18th Streets.
- Reconfigure Skyline Park to be a significant Downtown open space and continue pedestrian amenities to 14th Street.



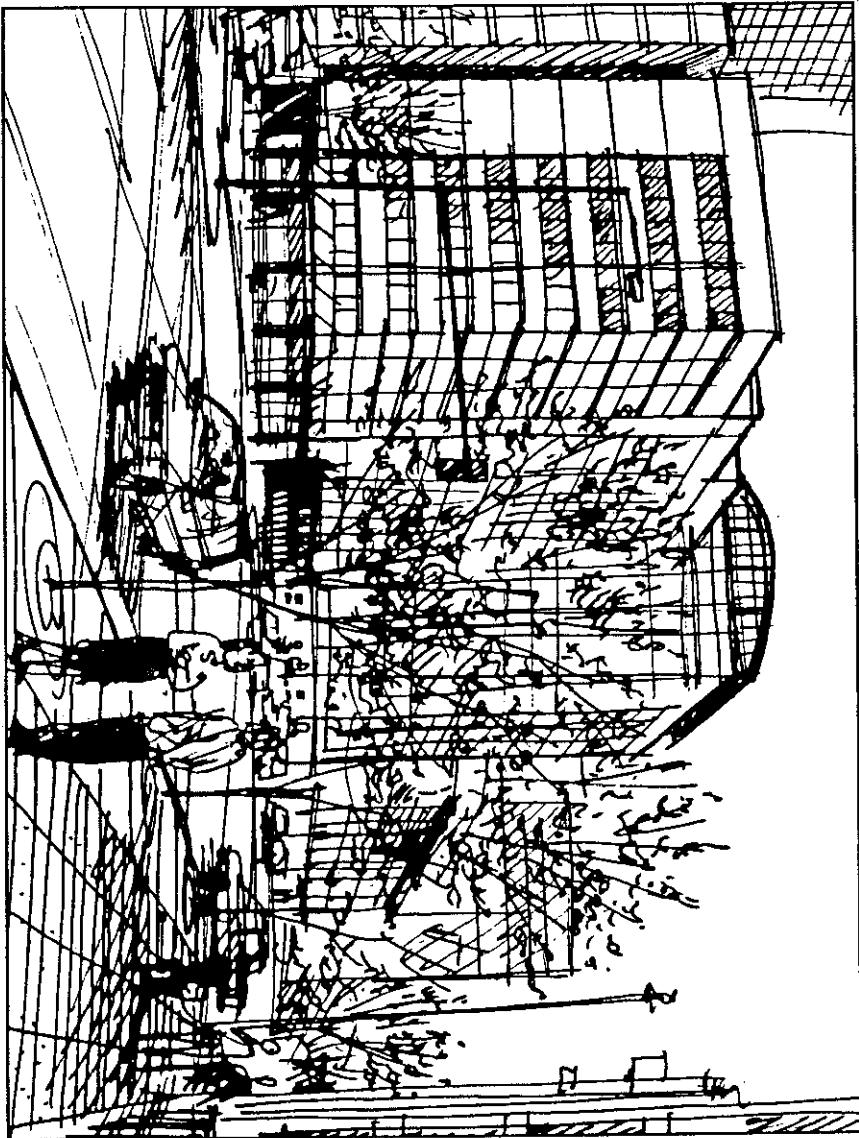
*Figure 15: 14th Street*

### *Principle 3*

#### **15th Street**

Enhance the commercial viability of 15th Street.

- Encourage new development along 15th Street to create a "downtown" character.
- Improve bus stops to eliminate unkempt/uncared for appearance.
- Continue Downtown streetscape.
- Maintain rhythm of streets and alleys.



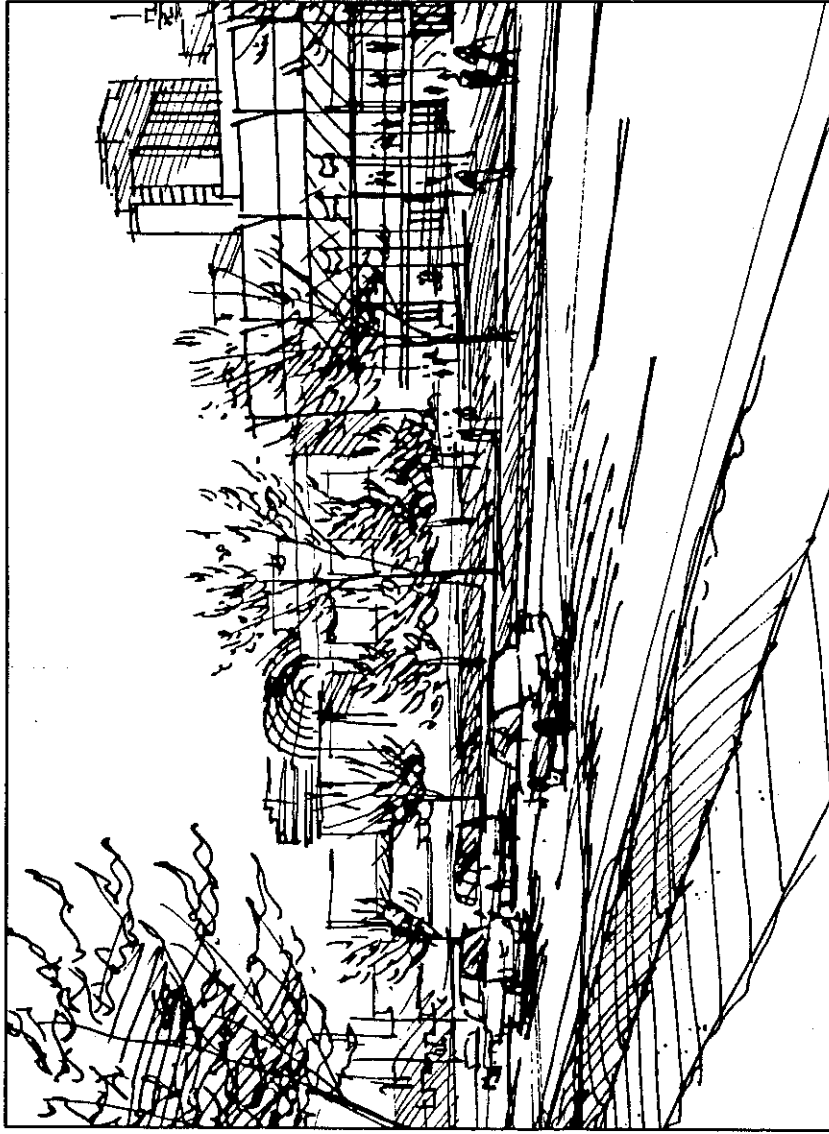
*Figure 16: 15th Street*

### *Principle 4*

#### **Speer Boulevard**

Respect the formal landscape edge of Speer Boulevard.

- Address and reinforce Speer Boulevard's attributes as Denver's premier landscape boulevard.
- Provide active uses (such as the Sewell Ballroom) along Speer Boulevard that take advantage of views to and from the boulevard.
- Maintain landscaped open space edge.



*Figure 17: Speer Boulevard*

