Colfax Avenue Concept Plan (CACP)

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The Colfax Avenue Concept Plan is intended to be the vision for Colfax Avenue. As a vision document, the plan gives guidance to City Staff in the development review process and to property owners along the Colfax corridor and serves as a foundation for future policies. The concept plan is focused on improvements that are desired as part of redevelopment along all of Colfax within Denver’s boundaries, but property owners could install the suggested improvements at any time if they desire. This plan is intended to give guidance of the vision for Colfax beyond the standard development infrastructure requirements (such as ADA compliant curb ramps and sidewalk access and property access).

Colfax Avenue is an east-west principal arterial roadway servicing local and regional trips through the metro area of Denver. It joins three metropolitan jurisdictions (Denver, Lakewood, and Aurora) and connects downtown Denver to many regional destinations. Colfax Avenue is part of the state highway system designated as US Route 40. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) controls the right-of-way and coordinates with the City and County of Denver to maintain, install and operate the roadway and associated infrastructure (including drainage, traffic signals, wayfinding and directional signs as well as fire hydrants and other safety elements).

Many studies and plans focusing on Colfax Avenue have been completed. One common theme throughout is the call for an improved orientation of the street to the pedestrian and transit user. Main Street zoning was put in place and only slightly modified when the new form-based code was adopted in 2010, which identifies how buildings should relate to the street. The purpose of the Colfax Avenue Concept Plan (CACP) is to identify opportunities and provide recommendations for improvements to the pedestrian zone, including both the amenity zone and sidewalk (as defined and illustrated in the Public Works Rules and Regulations for Standard Right-of-Way Cross Sections and Utility Locations), from the back of curb to building front, generally within the dedicated right-of-way (ROW). If the vision within the CACP is realized Colfax Avenue can be the model for land use and transportation strategies to apply on “Enhanced Transit Corridors” citywide. The CACP provides a vision for the evolution of the current conditions to allow for strengthening the pedestrian zone. By using redevelopment as one of the catalysts, many of the near-term improvements can be accomplished. While the focus of improvements may vary along different segments of Colfax, examples of strengthening elements include increasing sidewalk width, introducing street trees and providing transit amenities, all of which support increased economic viability for the corridor.

Colfax is designated as an “Enhanced Transit Corridor” under Blueprint Denver. The CACP has been created to provide a vision for the future of the corridor and to guide the improvement of the pedestrian and transit oriented environment along Colfax Avenue. This means providing safe and comfortable spaces with convenient access for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles. Strengthening the pedestrian and transit environment can be promoted through design. Examples of design elements that strengthen the pedestrian zone include:

- Enhancing pedestrian safety and comfort through the creation of a pedestrian amenity zone, street trees and planters as well as lighting improvements
- Encouraging transit use by improving the condition of bus stops and transit amenities

The CACP will help City staff, developers and property owners understand the vision for the corridor, and identify opportunities for implementing this vision through the City’s regulatory processes, which in turn will help make the development review process more transparent. As part of the site development review process opportunities to create and maintain a pedestrian zone will be examined. This pedestrian zone, which includes both the sidewalk and amenity zone, helps
establish a character that supports the revitalization and beautification of the corridor. Some of improvements, such as street trees and pedestrian lighting, may require maintenance by property owners or through other mechanisms, though many improvements, such as repair and upkeep of sidewalks and trees are already the responsibility of individual property owners.

Below are three typical pedestrian zone illustrations. These include, left to right: sidewalk next to a parking lot; sidewalk adjacent to transit stop and amenities; and sidewalk next to storefront.

![Pedestrian zone illustrations]

**Corridor-Wide Issues and Other Items of Interest**

Colfax Avenue is an important arterial that serves citywide and regional travel to and from Downtown Denver and provides access to intense mixed land uses including office, retail, residential, and public. With an emphasis on mobility, Colfax is generally designed to accommodate vehicle trips in the form of passenger cars, trucks, and buses. The typical 60-foot travel width found along the corridor represents the minimum area needed for vehicular and transit through traffic and consideration of changes to the travel corridor are outside of the scope of this plan. At the time of this plan bicycle facilities are minimal, but a strong parallel network exists. Pedestrian facilities are provided, but the width and condition of these facilities vary depending upon adjacent land use, the level of pedestrian activity and the level of recent private investment. Travel by alternative modes is extremely important along the corridor to increase mobility options, and efficiently utilize land. The current Colfax Avenue bus transit routes include the 15/15L and the 16/16L. The following issues are generally applicable to the entire roadway in Denver.

Street improvement projects in the past have resulted in narrowed pedestrian zone. The pedestrian zone is also constrained by narrow, broken or incomplete sidewalks; encroachments into the pedestrian areas by utilities, newspaper dispensers, displays for car dealerships, and sand and gravel grit on sidewalks. In the winter the pedestrian zone is also impacted by snow, ice and gravel, particularly on the south side of the street.

The traffic volumes along Colfax are considered an asset by many businesses. However, excessive curb cuts and traffic congestion at intersections introduces numerous potential conflicts between all user types and affects overall traffic operations. Reducing the number of curb cuts along the corridor would provide safer and more attractive environment for business and pedestrians and help reduce traffic congestion.

**Pedestrian Zone** – A pedestrian zone is created by conditions that encourage a continuous pedestrian environment. This is accomplished through pedestrian-oriented streetscapes which include attractive building frontages and pedestrian amenities such as trash receptacles, benches, bus shelters, bicycle racks, decorative sidewalks, drinking fountains, kiosks or neighborhood directories, landscaping and trees, lighting, outdoor fountains, plazas, public art, storefronts, and window
displays. Blocks that exhibit pedestrian character promote people walking on the sidewalk and accessing storefronts and businesses. Some areas have existing conditions with incompatible features such as blank walls and parking lots abutting the sidewalk. In other areas there is a limited amount of ROW in which to locate improvements. Given this challenge in areas throughout the corridor there is a preference for locating trees in tree grates to help provide pedestrian access. In cases where there is more generous ROW opportunities to locate trees in a tree lawn are encouraged to promote tree viability and longevity. This plan provides a vision for future improvements achieved upon redevelopment of properties exhibiting these incompatible features.

**Bulb-outs** – Bulb-outs can provide additional pedestrian refuge areas at intersections and help define crossing points and shorten the crossing distance. Any bulb-out proposed in the ROW is subject to drainage considerations as well as traffic patterns and impact to existing parking and transit stops. The feasibility of bulb-outs would need to be assessed on a site by site basis. Prior to programming or designing bulb-outs, or other potential drainage barriers, an engineering drainage analysis, traffic study and coordination with CDOT should be conducted to evaluate the extent of existing offsite drainage approaching Colfax Avenue.

**Curb Cut Consolidation and Alley Vacations** – The CACP encourages identifying opportunities to reduce, remove, or consolidate abandoned, unused and unnecessary curb cuts and alleys that front onto Colfax. Reducing curb cuts along Colfax will enhance the safety and efficiency along the corridor for both pedestrians and vehicles and decrease conflict points between users. Where possible and especially where sanitary lines make it feasible, alleys should be terminated in “T” or “L” configurations (see illustrations) between commercial properties and residential neighborhood boundaries. Linear development assemblages fronting Colfax should be encouraged. This may result in an increase in curb cuts on side streets. A new alley alignment could allow a vacant parcel to be incorporated into an assemblage that is contiguous to the corridor, and resultant development would fill a gap in the urban neighborhood fabric.

The 14 mile CACP study area has been divided into four Focus Areas. They begin at Sheridan, the western boundary of the City and County of Denver with Lakewood and end at Yosemite, the eastern jurisdictional boundary of the City and County of Denver and Aurora. Within each focus area the unique patterns within the existing ROW are identified including land uses, transportation elements and general character. From west to east, the Focus Areas are:

- **Area 1**: Sheridan to Federal (5200 W to 3200 W)
- **Area 2**: Osage to Sherman (1500 W to 200 E)
- **Area 3**: Sherman to Colorado Blvd (200 E to 4000 E)
- **Area 4**: Colorado Blvd to Yosemite (4000 E to 8900 E)

Main Street Zone Districts have been established along the Colfax Corridor and are intended to promote safe, active, and pedestrian-scaled commercial development through the use of shopfront and row house building forms that clearly define and activate the public street edge. This development pattern is intended to enhance the convenience, ease and enjoyment of transit, walking, shopping and public gathering along the city’s commercial streets. The Main Street district standards are also intended to ensure new development contributes positively to established residential neighborhoods and character, and improves the transition between commercial development and adjacent residential neighborhoods. These zone districts are typically applied in a linear fashion along entire block faces of commercial, industrial, main street, mixed-use and residential arterial streets (as designated in Blueprint Denver) or, less frequently, on single zone lots at the intersection of local/collector streets within a residential neighborhood.
Throughout the study area there are many common opportunities for improvements to the pedestrian zone and overall character of the corridor. These opportunities may be realized through reinvestment and redevelopment of private properties as well as public/private partnerships. One of the most common challenges throughout the corridor is limited ROW resulting in narrow sidewalks and limited amenities.

**Common Opportunities**

- Enhance Colfax, along its length as a multimodal facility to accommodate a complex transportation network.
- Provide a pedestrian amenity zone (separating the sidewalks from the curb with a landscape buffer) to create a continuous network of pedestrian connectivity.
- Make selected improvements in transit access, including transit centers/stops, with necessary changes in utilities and drainage.
- With any redevelopment, street trees should be planted whenever possible as part of the Development Review process.
• In many instances there is not currently adequate right of way to provide improvements such as increased sidewalk width, trees and street furniture. In such cases special consideration should be made to maximize the clear walkable area and design of building or private property frontage.

• Where a parking lot is immediately adjacent to the pedestrian amenity zone, explore the use of railings and low walls to provide a separation from pedestrians and vehicles.

• Explore all opportunities for consolidation and shared access points for redeveloping properties using side streets and alleys to their best advantage.

• Investigate opportunities to reduce curb cuts for existing properties where possible.

• Where possible, overhead utilities should be buried to reduce sidewalk obstacles and obstacles to future growth of street trees.

• Identification and preservation of historic properties along the corridor takes precedent over other priorities such as sidewalk widening and installation of pedestrian amenities.

• Explore all opportunities to retain and preserve historic commercial signage, including commercial and street identification signage.

AREA 1: SHERIDAN TO FEDERAL (5200 W – 3200 W)

West Colfax Avenue offers a diversity of land uses with commercial and institutional properties dominating this segment of Colfax. This area includes the former St. Anthony’s/Centura Medical Center (to be redeveloped), Colfax and Cheltenham Elementary Schools, Sloan’s Lake Park, Lakewood Dry Gulch Trail and is adjacent to the Invesco Field at Mile High Stadium. Commercial businesses include food and entertainment, automotive-related specialty retail, and lodging. North and south of West Colfax Avenue, the primary land use pattern is a mixture of single family, duplex and multifamily residential uses. Significant redevelopment opportunities exist at the former St Anthony’s/Centura Medical Center site and at the Avondale Shopping Center site. The Westside Library will be a new addition to the West Colfax Corridor at Colfax and Irving. Multiple potential historic properties exist along the corridor, though none are currently designated.

RTD will open the West Corridor Light Rail line in 2013. The line is located within the Lakewood Dry Gulch corridor which will provide additional transit service linking the neighborhood to the Jefferson County Municipal center to the west and Denver Union Station to the east. This segment of Colfax includes numerous bus stops and a major bus transfer point at Sheridan.
The West Colfax BID was established in 2008, bound by Sheridan to the west and approximately Irving to the east. This active business improvement district worked with the City to identify improvements that were be funded by a 2007 Better Denver Bond project. The Bond improvements include gateway medians, reconfiguring on street parking, sidewalk enhancements and street light upgrades. In addition, the BID has obtained funding from the Office of Economic Development to allow for additional streetscape improvements which may includes lighting, art, landscaping elements and street trees.

- Trees located in sidewalk grates are preferable to tree lawns given maintenance and pedestrian access issues.

**AREA 2: OSAGE TO SHERMAN**

Colfax Avenue is a two-way street with limited on-street parking and provides direct access to downtown Denver. There are a variety of land uses along this stretch of Colfax serving the residents, students, commuters, and tourists of Denver. Between Osage and Speer, the north side of Colfax is occupied with the Auraria Higher Education Center and the south side of Colfax includes the Historically Designated Westside Courthouse and a variety of auto oriented commercial uses which may present a future redevelopment opportunity. Between Speer and Sherman, the corridor is dominated by a variety of Civic uses including the Denver Justice Center, Historically Designated US Mint, City and County Building and other governmental offices, Civic Center Park and its accompanying Historic District and the State Capitol.

Public transit is an extremely important mode of travel on Colfax through Downtown Denver. The light rail runs along Colfax between Osage and Kalamath, adjacent to the Auraria Campus. In this area there are bus stops, centralized bus transfer facilities, specialized signage, adjacent crossings for light rail lines, and signalization supporting light rail progression. Civic Center Station, located near the intersection of Broadway and Colfax, is a major bus transfer point and is the eastern terminus of the 16th Street Mall Shuttle.
Recent redevelopment projects such as the Denver Justice Center, the Webb Municipal Building, Civic Center Park Improvements, the Denver Newspaper Agency building and ongoing intersection improvements at Galapago, Welton, Tremont and Delaware provide improved pedestrian access adjacent to and across Colfax in this area. Due to the substantial amount of pedestrian traffic generated by Downtown employment, special event attendance, the Auraria Campus, the Denver Justice Center, access from the Cherry Creek Trail, and retail activity, pedestrian facilities should be designed and maintained to promote pedestrian traffic. This stretch of Colfax sees high levels of mobility during peak hours, heavy pedestrian activity, intensive bus and light rail transit movements, frequent and disruptive loading and unloading activities, minimal on-street parking, a large reservoir of off-street parking, and complex underground utility systems. Sidewalks vary in terms of width and condition. There are crosswalks and pedestrian crossing signals at many intersections to enhance pedestrian connectivity. The pedestrian pathway east of Speer Blvd is difficult to negotiate because of narrow sidewalks, but improves farther east near the civic buildings. In some areas, curb cuts and traffic congestion at intersections impedes the smooth flow of vehicular traffic. A smoother traffic flow would provide safer and more attractive environment for business and pedestrians.

A portion of this segment of Colfax, from Speer Boulevard to Broadway Street, will have infrastructure improvements funded by a 2007 Better Denver Bond project. The planned improvements include upgraded medians, crossing enhancements and street light upgrades.

- Trees located in sidewalk grates are preferable to tree lawns given maintenance and pedestrian access issues. Investigate opportunities to separate the sidewalks from the curb with a landscape buffer on the south side of Colfax between Osage and Kalamath.

**AREA 3: SHERMAN TO COLORADO BOULEVARD (200 E to 4000 E)**

Colfax Avenue from Sherman to Colorado Blvd is a multi-modal, commercial, and residential street serving the residents, commuters, and tourists of Denver. Commercial businesses include food and entertainment, automotive-related, specialty retail, fast food drive-through, and lodging. Colfax provides low and medium-intensity retail and mixed land uses. This segment of Colfax serves the neighborhoods of Capitol Hill, Cheesman Park, Congress Park, and City Park. The primary land...
use pattern north and south of East Colfax Avenue is single family, duplex and multifamily residential. Denver City Council created a new Main Street zone district to encourage redevelopment and revitalization along East Colfax reflecting the historic development patterns along the corridor. This segment of Colfax has many historic resources scattered along its length including the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Ogden Theater, The Colonnade, Hamilton Apartment Building, Park Ave Historic District, Wyman Historic District, Austin Building, First Church of Christian Science, East High School, City Park Esplanade Historic District, and the Bluebird Theater.

Public transit is an important mode of travel along Colfax and is the highest ridership corridor in the City; both the 15 and 15 L routes serve this segment. This stretch of Colfax sees high levels of mobility during peak hours, heavy pedestrian activity, intensive bus movements, loading and unloading activities and sporadic on-street parking. Sidewalks vary in terms of width and condition.

There are two special districts in this segment of Colfax. The East Colfax BID was established in 1989, and is bound by Grant to the west and approximately Josephine to the east. In addition, the Greektown Local Maintenance District was established in 1998, and is bound by Josephine to the west and St. Paul to the east. These districts have worked with the City to identify improvements that were funded by the 2007 Better Denver Bond project. The improvements include pedestrian lighting, street trees, and sidewalk enhancements.

- Trees located in sidewalk grates are preferable to tree lawns given maintenance and pedestrian access issues.

AREA 4: COLORADO BOULEVARD TO YOSEMITE (4000 E to 8900 E)

The National Jewish Hospital anchors the western end of this segment of Colfax. As one proceeds eastward the corridor transitions into a more residential character with one-story retail buildings and businesses on both sides. Many vacant lots and buildings are suitable for redevelopment. Colfax from Grape to Monaco encompasses small neighborhood areas where the character changes from medium to large retail and includes used-car dealerships and automotive uses. At Krameria, the retail area extends south of Colfax to 13th Avenue and contains large national retailers, including King Soopers, Safeway, and Walgreens. Colfax from Monaco to Syracuse is dominated by car dealerships and automotive services, as well as motels and motor lodges.
Public transit continues to be an important mode of travel within this segment of Colfax. Both the 15 and 15 L routes serve this segment. The insufficient width of sidewalks and obstructions challenge pedestrians. On-street parking is limited in this segment due to the presence of multiple curb cuts, and is generally limited in this segment. Traffic interruptions result from frequent vehicular turn movements at side streets, curb cuts into individual businesses, and merging buses.

Syracuse and Yosemite Streets frame two nearby major development areas. To the north is the redevelopment of the former Stapleton Airport, and to the south is the redevelopment of Lowry Air Force Base. Each of these areas are evolving from public uses to mixed use developments focused on residential and retail opportunities.

- Trees located in sidewalk grates are preferable to tree lawns given maintenance and pedestrian access issues where there is constrained ROW. However, investigate opportunities to separate the sidewalks from the curb with a landscape buffer where opportunities exist.

**Next Steps**

- Complete the Living Streets Initiative to provide more definition of how to enhance multimodal corridors such as Colfax.
- Leverage funding opportunities, both city and public/private, to design and construct improvements consistent with the vision in this document.
- Review city other regulations to help achieve this vision.
- Use this vision plan as a resource for the upcoming East Colfax Alternatives Analysis that will be looking at streetcar and other transit alternatives.
- Assure that the CACP is taken into consideration whenever infrastructure projects are undertaken.
- Explore how the allowed 5’ flexibility in the build to requirements in Main Street Zoning could be utilized in portions of Colfax where right of way is limited.
- Streetscape - A Denver Streetscape Manual is currently assessing existing streetscape regulations and guidelines in order to provide a comprehensive resource for streetscape improvements.
- Drainage (Flo-2D) The City of Denver is taking proactive steps to study drainage issues on a corridor wide basis throughout the city and to prioritize areas of opportunity for public and private investment.