A CONNECTED CITY:
links between civic space and neighborhoods

As Denver becomes a City in a Park, stronger connections are crucial. This chapter discusses recommendations for improving the physical links that connect a City in a Park—between our civic spaces and neighborhoods; among public spaces in Downtown Denver; and via urban waterways to greenways and open space.
A City in a Park creates new links between neighborhoods and a strong urban core. With improved connections between Civic Center and the 16th Street Mall, and between the Auraria Campus and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Downtown truly becomes the city’s “civic heart.”

Green Streets offer shady, pedestrian-friendly connections among neighborhood parks, schools, recreation centers, waterways, and Downtown. Off-street trails and connections fill in gaps in the current trails system.

Along Cherry Creek, the Platte, Sand Creek, and the West Side gulches, new parks and trail links provide recreation and access. Restored natural open space becomes a haven for urban wildlife. People can cross road, rails, and rivers to cross the city on bike and by foot.

**DENVER’S DOWNTOWN: A VITAL CIVIC HEART**

**Vision**
A City in a Park features a vital Downtown, with attractive, pedestrian-friendly, complementary connections to public and private open spaces.

**Values**
Downtown means many things to Denver residents—a special outing on the 16th Street Mall, a sporting event at the Pepsi Center, a stroll along the river through Confluence Park, visits to the Denver Art Museum and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and a schoolchild’s first visit to the State Capitol.

Increasingly, it also means home to residents who have revitalized Downtown and Lower Downtown into bustling urban neighborhoods. All of this activity is occurring in about a one square mile area—bounded by I-25 to the west, 12th Avenue to the south, Logan to the east, and Park Avenue to the north—that embraces both Cherry Creek and the Platte.

“Good places tend to be all of a piece—and the reason can almost always be traced to a human being.”

William H. Whyte
The 1986 Downtown Area Plan and current D-Map established a compelling vision of economic vitality, cultural leadership, design excellence, and places for people to live and play that still guides development. Included within that vision are ideas for revitalizing Downtown, such as:

- a focused center and urban core,
- varied public open spaces, from streets to parks to cultural attractions,
- a place where people live, and
- a place of easy movement, with strong pedestrian, auto and transit connections between destinations.

Game Plan public open houses underscored support for these ideas and others presented in the 1986 plan. Though much work remains,
many of the plan’s ideas have been realized, such as opening access to Cherry Creek and constructing Commons Park. Others, like extending the 16th Street Mall and revitalizing Skyline Park, are in progress.

### Performance Indicators

The D-Map and 1986 Plan will provide the strongest guidance in setting qualitative performance expectations for the city’s urban core.

#### Game Plan Downtown Core

**Performance Goals:**

- Develop Downtown as a connected system of public open spaces, with strong physical links among activities.
- Provide a wide range of public spaces that vary in character and scale, from grand traditional parks to urban hardscaped plazas.
- Provide varied programming for Downtown spaces to attract patrons.
- Provide strong, accessible pedestrian connections among Downtown public spaces, and provide links to transit facilities.
- Provide for parks and recreation amenities at the appropriate service levels described above, to meet the growing needs of Downtown residents.

#### How Does the City Measure Up?

Significant strides were made in the past decade, with the completion of Commons Park and the extension of the 16th Street Mall. These actions have strengthened the physical form of Downtown as an east-west spine connecting grand and formal city parks.

Work remains, however, to develop strong north-south green connections linking the city core to civic institutions south of Cherry Creek, such as the Auraria Campus, and to the cultural attractions in Five Points to the north.

To address the need for north-south connections, the Game Plan proposes a long-range connection between Auraria Campus and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, creating a “land bridge” over Speer Boulevard that could provide both a connection and additional acres of Downtown’s green space. While technically feasible, such a land bridge would likely need to be undertaken with new, moderate-density development to share costs.
Pedestrian connections between Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods also need to be strengthened. One significant area is the connection between the Denver Art Museum and Public Library (and emerging Golden Triangle neighborhood to the south), and Civic Center. Bannock Street would provide a logical connection point to Speer; a variety of traffic calming and physical improvements should be investigated with the Pedestrian Master Plan undertaken by Public Works.

Finally, the emergence of Downtown’s neighborhoods will have a huge effect on parks and recreation. About 4,200 people live in Denver’s Downtown core, including the Central Business District and Lower Downtown, and are served well by open space. By 2025, Blueprint Denver estimates

A possible Land Bridge over Speer Boulevard, connecting Auraria campus to Downtown
that Downtown’s residential population will grow to 40,000 people. The current service standards described in Chapter 3 imply a need for an additional 30 to 40 acres of parkland and Downtown’s open space.

These acres should ideally encompass the same wide variety of public spaces as described in the green neighborhoods section of Chapter 3. Playgrounds and tot lots may be needed near residential areas to accommodate young families. Urban squares may be provided in the highest density areas. Larger patches of green like the Auraria Campus could accommodate larger civic festivals if connected across Speer.

As Union Station is transformed into a multi-modal transit hub, thousands of people will pass through plaza spaces connecting them to Downtown. Business consortia such as the Downtown Denver Partnership and educational institutions must have a strong voice in the development of these proposals for Downtown. These organizations should contribute to strategic and physical plans that may follow from the Game Plan, and should be partners in implementation.

Recommendations for Denver’s Downtown

1. Develop a strategic master plan for Downtown neighborhoods using the projected 2025 population figures. Address connections as well as projected needs for public open space.

2. Strengthen pedestrian connections between Civic Center and 16th Street Mall.

3. Connect Denver Center for the Performing Arts (DCPA) to Auraria Campus with a connection across Speer. This continuous park space will unite the campus with Downtown and create a large gathering space to augment Civic Center Park. Nearby parking at the Auraria Campus and easy shuttle service to the Mile High and Pepsi Center lots, as well as current and proposed light rail, make this venue attractive.

4. Within the framework of the D-Map and 1986 plan, identify opportunities for new and enhanced open spaces.

5. Improve connections from the west edge of the Golden Triangle to Civic Center.

6. Encourage a vibrant street life Downtown through a market district, festivals and street activities.
A SYSTEM OF GREEN STREET CONNECTIONS

Vision
A City in a Park envisions continuous, safe, and accessible sidewalks and other pedestrian connections among Denver neighborhoods for people of all ages and abilities, using a range of transportation options.

Values
The city’s infrastructure is designed to convey people and goods. These roadways, rail lines, waterways, and ditches also can create barriers between neighborhoods, local parks and recreation facilities. “Our parks and trails are great, but we can’t get there” was a common refrain at public open houses.

Some Northwest Denver neighborhoods are blessed with an abundance of parks, but busy arterial streets such as Federal Boulevard create perceived barriers to access. In some areas, parents say that rail lines and truck routes prevent their children from visiting parks and recreation facilities on foot, without an adult accompanying them to ensure that they cross safely. With many parents working long hours, children rarely may get to use the parks.

Almost 40 percent of Denver residents surveyed in 2001 said that improving connections and access were priorities. Citizens most often mentioned these elements as missed opportunities or “must dos” within expansion plans.

Performance Indicators
The Game Plan has adopted the following qualitative performance goals:

Game Plan Green Connections Performance Goals:

- Provide continuous, safe connections on at least one side of each “green street,” connecting parks to schools, recreation centers, and neighborhood centers. A green street has an adequate sidewalk and street tree canopy.

- Improve the safety of pedestrian crossings at arterials and other heavily trafficked streets.
Ensure universal access for all ages and abilities.

Provide continuous sidewalks that conform to city standards.

Install a detached sidewalk with tree lawn where feasible; tree lawns should be at least 8 feet wide.

Provide dedicated bike lanes where feasible.

How Does the City Measure Up?
The city’s parkway system (map on opposite page) provides a model for a broader system of green connections. By design, most parkways are relatively pedestrian friendly, with wide tree lawns separating sidewalks from the street, as shown in the “tree lawn” photo. But as the map shows, the parkway system is limited to certain geographic areas of the city.

With retrofitting, many residential streets could complement the parkway system and begin to knit the city together. The “Green Streets” sketch shows opportunities for strengthening and expanding green connections by linking schools and parks to proposed breathing spaces and other neighborhood amenities. These proposed Green Streets would be different from other city streets in three ways:

- The width and continuity of tree lawns, as well as the tree species that are planted;
- The width and continuity of sidewalks; and
- The spacing of street trees and possibly tree species.

This differentiation would allow Green Streets to be identified as a system, providing both visual and physical links to important civic spaces.

Current streetscape standards offer a foundation for creating this system of green connections. The Game Plan adopts these standards, but acknowledges that existing conditions in some neighborhoods may make standards difficult to achieve without significant expense, or without significant acquisition of new rights-of-way.

For example, post-World War II neighborhoods often lack or feature sidewalks that do not meet city standards. Other neighborhoods exhibit wide variations in sidewalk sections from block to block. These areas will be more challenging and expensive to retrofit. More detailed study and adaptation of these standards will be completed through the citywide Pedestrian Master Plan, as directed by Blueprint Denver.

The Game Plan endorses Blueprint Denver recommendations for improving crossings at major arterial streets viewed by residents as
Existing Parkways

LEGEND

- Designated Denver Parkways
- Existing Parks and Natural Areas and Denver Parks in Development
hazardous. The city should consider pedestrian improvements or “traffic-calming” devices. The neighborhood planning process can help identify areas of greatest concern.

**Recommendations for Green Street Connections**

1. **Continue to work with Public Works to develop the Pedestrian Master Plan,** intended to document conditions, refine guidelines, create standards and prototypes for retrofitting neighborhoods, and a schedule and cost estimates for improvements.

2. **Revise the city’s streetscape and median design manuals on the basis of the Pedestrian Master Plan.** Reissue as a joint document adopted by DPR, CPD and Public Works.

3. **Address impacts of curb cuts and driveway aprons on tree lawns and sidewalks,** and revise guidelines for these features to encourage continuous green space and promote pedestrian safety.

4. **Ensure that Green Streets meet the Transportation Standards and Policy document.**

5. **Design tree lawns to help improve stormwater quality.**

**CITYWIDE AND REGIONAL TRAIL CONNECTIONS**

**Vision**

Off-street trails complement the grid of Green Streets and connect Denverites to the region.

**Values**

All residents want to overcome poor connections. Residents at public forums requested more recreational trails like the High Line Canal and Cherry Creek Trail to connect parks and create longer cycling or walking loops. Others mentioned the value of bridging barriers like the Platte, I-25, or Cherry Creek.

Opportunities for creating major new off-street connections within the city are, again, limited by development. DPR can help identify missing links to provide safe access from each neighborhood to these major trails.

**Performance Indicators**

The *Game Plan* has established the following qualitative performance goals for off-street connections:
For larger Section Maps, see the Appendix.

LEGEND

- Proposed Green Streets
Game Plan Off-street Connections
Performance Goals

► Provide safe access to off-street trails, ideally no more than one half mile to one mile from major residential areas.

► Complete “missing links” in the off-street trail system to improve connections.

► Ensure that links are strengthened to major regional and metrowide trail systems.

How Does the City Measure Up?
The current system of off-street trails encompass 51 miles of primarily paved pathways that form a web through the city. An important regional link, the High Line Canal Trail, spans another 110 miles. Other major links include the Sand Creek Regional Greenway from Aurora through Denver to Commerce City, as well as the Clear Creek and Bear Creek trails.

Within this generally strong network, the Bicycle Master Plan noted gaps such as missing or difficult segments through Denver, and connecting the Clear Creek and Bear Creek trails to Northwest and Southwest Denver to the mountain parks. Drainageways to the west with missing sections include: Weir Gulch, Sanderson Gulch, Lakewood Dry Gulch, the Westwood Trail, far Southwest and Southeast Denver through Goldsmith Gulch, and connections between Lowry and Stapleton.

The Game Plan also proposes major street level and grade-separated crossings along I-25, Cherry Creek, and the Platte. These may connect neighborhoods and proposed transit-oriented developments to urban waterways and parks. Some connections may themselves function as parks, similar to Seattle’s Freeway Park, built on a large platform over I-5. Bridges and other “crossing” structures can feature distinctive designs.

Recommendations for Off-Street Trail Connections

1. Improve off-street connections through drainageways and gulches, possibly including the following:
   - Clear Creek Trail linking Denver to mountain parkland,
   - Lakewood Gulch to Martinez Park,
   - Off-street connections for the Weir Gulch corridor, and
   - Sanderson Gulch between Lipan Street and the Platte River Trail.

2. In heavily used areas, consider separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians.
3. Plan for future trends, especially those aimed at mitigating accessibility issues. For example, identify areas where assisted devices such as electric bikes may be appropriate.

4. Study utility easements for potential trail connections, for example at Westwood Park to the Westwood Trail and the extension of the Westwood Trail east of Federal Boulevard to Zuni.

5. Define a range of trail types for different conditions, from 10-foot-wide hard-surface paths for heavily traveled urban areas, to narrower, soft-surface paths for more natural settings.

6. Improve linkages of far Southwest neighborhoods by acquiring privately owned rights-of-way identified in the Bicycle Master Plan.

7. Extend Wagon Trail with a connection around Marston Lake.

8. Link far Southeast neighborhoods through Hutchinson Park East and Goldsmith Gulch.

9. Improve links between Lowry and Stapleton with better on-street bicycle routes on Syracuse and Yosemite streets and by developing Westerly Creek Trail.

10. Preserve rights-of-way along the First Creek and Second Creek drainage corridors, and construct these trails through the Gateway area.

11. Improve the Platte River pedestrian and bicycle crossings in the following locations:
   ▶ link potential Evans transit-oriented development (TOD) across the Platte at Evans or Iliff. Iliff would provide a continuous connection, from Harvard Gulch through Rosedale Parks to Grant Frontier Park, to potential new community-scale parks on the west edge of the Platte.
   ▶ link Valverde to Baker neighborhoods and the north edge of the proposed Gate transit-oriented development.
   ▶ provide continuous connections through Weir Gulch.
   ▶ link 13th Avenue and Lakewood Dry Gulch across the Platte for an eventual green-street connection to Lincoln Park.
   ▶ link the 16th Street Mall extension across the Platte and I-25 via the Millenium Bridge and two other bridges planned.
   ▶ link the city’s west and east sides immediately south of Cuemavaca Park.

12. Consider abandoned ditch systems for future stormwater conveyance and storage.

13. Restore and protect the drainageways’ natural open space plants and wildlife habitat.
HEALTHY AND ACCESSIBLE URBAN WATERWAYS

Vision
With Downtown as the city’s heart, a City in a Park envisions Denver’s urban waterways as a circulatory system, with corridors for wildlife and people that link the city to the region. Waterways also function as natural treatment systems to cleanse polluted stormwater runoff, while providing access to recreation.

Values
Through the 2001 Game Plan Survey and open houses, city residents asked for diverse recreational experiences, passive as well as active, along Denver’s waterways. Many supported new opportunities to recreate in the water, including canoeing and kayaking.

Residents are also seeking green connections to the water’s edge, safe crossings over waterways, new parkway connections next to the water, especially along the Platte at South Platte River Drive, and more opportunities to learn about water quality, native landscapes, and wildlife. Both natural areas and active parks supporting recreation are desired.

Performance Indicators
The Game Plan has established the following qualitative performance goals for urban waterways:

Game Plan Urban Waterway Performance Goals

- Ensure safe access to urban waterways from major residential areas.
- Expand natural open space along the Platte, Cherry Creek, and the gulches, improving habitat for urban wildlife.
- Increase the number and range of parks along the waterways, including some larger parks that support active recreation.
- Ensure safe pedestrian and bicycle connections across these waterways to link major recreational areas with activity areas and transit stops.
Urban Waterways and Waterway Parks
How Does the City Measure Up?

The Game Plan’s vision for urban waterways embraces many individual master plans for specific waterway segments, including the Platte, Cherry Creek, Westerly Creek, Sand Creek, Sanderson and Lakewood Dry Gulches. To ensure these plans reinforce each other, DPR’s main recommendations are synthesized below and form the context for a larger

South Platte Park of the Future

- Improve water quality and aquatic habitat.
- Increase opportunities for water-based recreation.
- Ensure continuous trail connections along major waterway trunk routes and branches.
waterways framework plan that DPR should develop following the Game Plan.

**Recommendations for Urban Waterways**

1. **Create a framework plan for urban waterways**
   - That synthesizes recommendations from the individual master plans into guidelines for waterway acquisition, restoration, park redevelopment, wildlife and human-use management, and water-quality objectives and best management practices.

2. **Identify potential new parkway accesses**
   - Along major waterways, to extend the system. Both Cherry Creek Drive and Platte River Drive could be enhanced to provide more of a parkway-like experience.

3. **Identify opportunities to acquire and bank land for large parks along the Platte.**
   - Examples include obsolete industrial or educational campuses or brownfields that could be reclaimed, such as the General Chemical site.
   - Areas with significant natural landforms, like the river bluffs, suggest interesting sites for parks. Large park sites should include varied experiences, landscapes, and opportunities for interpretation.

4. **Identify opportunities to expand parkland and natural open space along the West Side gulches.**

5. **Implement the Cherry Creek Master Plan’s recommendations for parks, natural areas, and connections.**
   - Identify opportunities to acquire and bank land for new parks along Cherry Creek.

6. **Refine criteria for parcel acquisition**
   - To evaluate whether parcels contribute to urban waterway goals and visions. (see sidebar for parcel acquisition criteria)

7. **Develop a recreation management plan**
   - For urban waterways that addresses appropriate uses, significance as habitat, and water quality.

**Preliminary Assessment Criteria for Parcel Acquisition**

- Opportunity for direct visual or physical link to a waterway
- Opportunity to create a large parcel (300 to 400 acres) that can support a community park
- Linkages to proposed transit, light-rail stops and transit-oriented development
- Potential to serve priority neighborhoods in need
- Brownfield site or low value-added from current use
Riparian area along the banks of Heron Pond