Sunken Gardens Park
Master Plan

Phase 1 Assessments

The Draft Assessments are for internal use by the consultant team, and serve as Reference Documents in the development of the Sunken Gardens Master Plan. Information contained in the Draft Assessments may be modified and/or amended by the consultant team throughout the duration of the project.

June 30, 2020—Draft
Table Of Contents

Site Assessment.................................................................................................................................................. 1
Levels of Service .............................................................................................................................................. 23
Neighborhood Assessment .......................................................................................................................... 31
Historic Assessment ..................................................................................................................................... 49
Timeline ......................................................................................................................................................... 71
Introduction

Located in Downtown Denver along Speer Boulevard, Sunken Gardens Park is located on the boundary between La Alma/Lincoln Park and the Civic Center/Golden Triangle neighborhoods and reflects Denver's rich and evolving history.

Design was initiated in 1909 and Sunken Gardens was just one component of Mayor Speer's vision for Denver inspired by the City Beautiful movement. In 1926, West High School was constructed adjacent to and west of Sunken Gardens.

The park's original design included two distinct components: to the north is an open, formal lawn including formal gardens and terraces that dropped ten feet below street level (lending the park its name), and to the south, the inwardly focused groves at the intersection of Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue. The park also included a pavilion, which was demolished in 1933, though the former structure's foundation, floor and steps remain today. The remnants of the reflecting pool's curb walls (which was filled in during the Polio outbreaks of the late 1940s) emerge from a cherished and frequently used open, formal lawn.

In 1986, the City and County of Denver's Parks and Parkways System was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the original nomination, Sunken Gardens was described as serving "the neighborhood to the South, as an embellishment to Speer Boulevard on the northeast and as a front yard to West Denver High School on the west and to Denver General Hospital (now Denver Health) on the South". In 2003, DPR prepared a master plan for the park which included a comprehensive Cultural Landscape Assessment and identified 1926 – 1930's as the period of greatest historic significance.

In March of 2020, the Department of Parks and Recreation initiated a master planning process to create a sustainable and implementable vision for the park that protects the park historic integrity and responds to current and future recreational needs of the community. The following assessments will be used to inform upcoming phases of the master planning process including an analysis of existing conditions and alternatives for park improvements.

Site Assessment

Context

Sunken Gardens Park serves as both a neighborhood park, providing unprogrammed open lawns and recreational amenities for the surrounding neighborhoods and West High School community, and as an important historic park that contains structural remnants of original public amenities.

The park adjoins the historic Speer Boulevard Parkway from the intersection of Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue north to 11th Avenue, and serves as the foreground – or front entry – to the campus with West Leadership Academy serving as the backdrop and definitive western edge to the park.

This historic 12.6-acre park is located on the boundary between the La Alma/Lincoln and Golden Triangle neighborhoods. The surrounding land uses range from institutional and educational campuses to a mix of single-family homes and new multifamily high rises. The Santa Fe Arts District and Broadway provide important cultural and commercial framework, and while these bustling streets lie just outside of the 10 minutes walkshed, many businesses and non-profits consider the park as a critical community amenity that reflects the history of the adjoining neighborhoods and residents.

Sunken Gardens Park is a well-known visual feature along Speer Boulevard, but it is less well known as a park to be experienced. There are both regional and local and site related access issues that contribute to that.

The Blueprint Denver Places Map combined with existing zoning indicate the potential for continued increases in residential redevelopment within the 10-minute walkshed (detailed information regarding both land use and population follows in the Neighborhood Assessment).

Population increases throughout the Front Range and Denver are evidenced by the new 10+ story residential structures emerging along Northbound Speer Boulevard. The rate of redevelopment along this section of the street is remarkable primarily because prior to recent redevelopment trends, the existing structures were typically one or two stories in height. Although the zoning for higher residential densities was in place, it was not until very recently that redevelopment of underutilized parcels started to along the western edge of Golden Triangle. The resulting explosion in residential development has created a new, emerging user base for Sunken Gardens, being the only park within a 10-minute walking distance from these new high-rise developments.

Circulation

Unlike other Denver historic parks such as Cheesman Park and City Park, Sunken Gardens contains no internal vehicular access, and relies on the bordering streets – arterials and local street network – for access into the park.
Sunken Gardens | Context

Legend:
- SUNKEN GARDEN PARK
- COUNCIL DISTRICT 3
- COUNCIL DISTRICT 7
- COUNCIL DISTRICT 9
- COUNCIL DISTRICT 10

Context Summary
Three edges of the park (Speer Boulevard, 8th Avenue and Elati Street) have undergone significant change since the 1930’s:

- Speer Boulevard has seen increased traffic operating at higher speeds.
- 8th Avenue has undergone similar changes compounded by its conversion to a one-way commuter arterial exiting downtown, combining with 6th Avenue to provide a pair of one-way direct commuter connections to and from the western suburbs.
- The role of Elati Street has also evolved over time. There was a trolley stop on Elati at the west entrance to the park through the 1920’s. In 2001, the street was converted from a two-way to a one-way street including continuous diagonal parking located on the east side (park edge) of the street and dedicated bus loading zones on the west side (school entrance) of the street.

Additionally, access to the park and into the park is challenging due to several adjacency issues, and that the perception that the park is easy to see, but difficult to access is real:

- Both the eastern and southern edges of the park are composed of nearly 3,000 linear feet of arterial and special-use roadway with signalized pedestrian intersections located only at the corners of the park.
- The conversion of 6th Avenue and 8th Avenue to a one-way commuter-oriented arterial limits north-south local bike and pedestrian traffic to and from the west side of the park.
- Speer Boulevard frontage from the 9th Avenue bridge to 11th Avenue extends for approximately 1,500 linear feet with one midblock crosswalk located at Bannock Street, which limits access to the Cherry Creek regional bike trail.
- Elati Street frontage extends for approximately 900 linear feet and is dominated by the West Leadership Academy (formerly West High School) that utilizes existing on-street diagonal parking for staff and student parking.

In 2019, the Downtown Denver Partnership developed a vision plan for the 5280 Loop Trail, a new urban trail “to connect Downtown’s unique and diverse amenities, while creating a powerful sense of place within mixed-use neighborhoods”. The existing concept links the Golden Triangle neighborhood to the La Alma/Lincoln neighborhood by introducing a new, formal urban trail through Sunken Gardens along the 9th Avenue alignment and crossing Speer Boulevard at Bannock Street, creating a unique opportunity to increase access and activity within the park and also raise awareness of the park’s unique history.

### Composition

Sunken Gardens Park is comprised of two distinct triangles of land that are a result of the original street grid being overlaid onto the Cherry Creek drainage corridor. This configuration combined with the presence of a historic Denver Public Schools high school campus results in a linear form that allowed for a variety of uses and delineated spaces to develop over time.

It is important to note that Sunken Gardens Park and the high school campus were not designed in unison, but that the school was developed after the park had been established and resulted in a definitive western edge to the park. The school’s primary entrance and eastern façade dominates the western edge of Sunken Gardens and is a view that is both memorable and cherished by Denver residents.

“*The relationship between West High School, Speer Boulevard, and Sunken Gardens Park remains integral to any discussion of the site. Sunken Gardens serves as a forecourt to West High School and the school as a backdrop to the park. Sunken Gardens also reinforces and enhances the boulevard experience desired along Speer*.” -2003 Sunken Gardens Master Plan

### View Corridors

The view across the northern section of the park from Speer Boulevard to the West Leadership Academy (formerly West High School) includes open lawns in the foreground and the ornate front façade of the school as the backdrop. The school’s front entrance is framed by mature evergreens and is a view that many Denver residents and visitors have shared over generations. Conversely, the views from the steps of the school and Elati Street looking back east across the lawn to Speer Boulevard are only foreground remnants of the original, historic view corridor from the park to the State Capitol building. Recently, the 5280 Trail Vision Plan identified the view from 9th Avenue north to the downtown skyline as a significant view corridor. Additionally, the viewshed along Speer Boulevard as seen from the eyes of a pedestrian walking on the linear, tree-lined sidewalk are a component of the original park design, and are also memorable, even if noise from adjacent traffic impacts the experience.
Regional Access and Circulation

LEGEND
- SUNKEN GARDEN PARK
- $280 PROPOSED LOOP
- DEDICATED BIKE LANES
- BIKE FRIENDLY ROADS
- TRAILS
SUNKEN GARDENS TO SANTA FE ALLEY

Sunken Gardens has two parts, its northern half is the site of the historic reflecting pools sunken into the landscape. The 5280 occupies the southern half, where its meandering trails serve as a connection to the Cherry Creek trail and across Speer to downtown from Lincoln/La Alma as well as neighborhoods to the south. The 5280 can create a new space for a reimagined park that serves as a place of recreation, healing and education.

The alley east of Santa Fe Between 10th and 11th Avenues is reimagined as a pedestrian focused spaces that allows more spaces and interactivity for galleries along Santa Fe while offering more space for First Friday Events and parties.
The southern section of the park does not offer expansive views; the space is inwardly focused with “...undulating terrain and evergreen groves suggesting a forest glen.”, per descriptive text from the 1987 Nomination Form submitted to the National Register of Historic Places. The existing character of this section is consistent with the original design intent the historic period of significance: the grade is depressed below street level with gradual transitions, and views are limited by densely planted groves of mature evergreen trees that also provide significant shade. The original design included a water feature reminiscent of the Box Canyon and Waterway in City Park. Although this water feature has been removed and covered, the swale that meanders through the grove remains.

**Structures**

The historic features of the park were critical components addressed in the 1987 Historic Register Nomination and informed the 2003 Sunken Gardens Master Plan recommendations. Many details of original City Beautiful embellishments are now gone, but the structural framework for many elements still exist:

- The depressed edges of the park – approximately 10 feet below street level – create a unique and welcoming sense of enclosure. This feature is also seen in the nearby Alamo Placita Park.

- The expansive manicured and maintained lawns are accessible from all sides of the park.

- The reflecting pool’s exposed top of wall is just visible at grade level and provides a unique edge that currently functions as a small playing field. School and local athletic groups utilize the formal lawn inside this edge while picnickers and sunbathers are drawn to the edge for both seating and leaning.

- Stairs leading from the surrounding streets into the interior of the park are visible from the interior of the open lawn and are used as both primary and secondary access points into the park.

- The pavilion’s original foundation, walls and floor and acts as a magnet for casual park users.

- Constructed in the 1930s, the existing maintenance yard includes an historic shed that is accessed from the corner of 9th Avenue and Delaware Street. The shed and accompanying yard are an important historic resource, and currently serve as critical component in the district’s maintenance regimes. The maintenance yard was expanded in 1966 and allows for storage, parking, and other support services.

- The Sunshade is located at the intersection of Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue and reflects the character of the original park design.

- In addition to the existing historic structures, there are formal recreation amenities contained within the park:
A playground is located in the southern section of the park, just south of the maintenance shed and yard.

Secured, painted concrete picnic tables adjoin the playground and are informally located in the southern section under the tree canopies, at the south end of the lawn below 9th Avenue and in the far northern end of the park.

A basketball half-court is located just off 9th Avenue where historic steps, restrooms and mechanical services were once located.

Sidewalks adjacent to each bordering street connect to create a perimeter hard surface walk that measures just over 4,000 linear feet, which is supplemented by internal “trails” including:

- A long internal trail parallel to Speer Boulevard
- A direct connection between the Bannock Street entrance, the playground and the corner of 8th Avenue and Delaware St.
- A narrow trail connecting West Leadership Academy to the main internal trail.
- 9th Avenue trail spur connects to the main internal trail and occupies the abandoned right-of-way. This existing trail has been identified as a potential alignment of the 5280 Loop Trail, connecting Acoma and Bannock Streets with 9th Avenue.

**Vegetation**

The existing landscape contains a combination of mature deciduous and evergreen trees and younger successional tree plantings on a simple bluegrass lawn. No trace of the formal annual gardens that were an original feature of the Park remain. However, the existing trees - including several specimen plantings in good condition – create a memorable and welcoming urban forest canopy.

The existing planting plan reflects the organizing principles of the historic design:

- The southern triangle feels like a forest glen shaded by large deciduous trees that define a series of small spaces, and triangle is bounded by tightly planted groves of mature coniferous species.
- The more formal northern triangle featuring open lawn and terraces is bounded by heavily planted edges including both the coniferous plantings that frame the view from Speer Boulevard to Denver West High School and large deciduous street trees – predominately Elm - on Speer Boulevard.

Condition: Based on recent site visits with the City Forester, the Sunken Gardens collection is comprehensive in terms of variety and in good general condition although close examination of some of the larger coniferous groves reveals a range in quality and condition.
• The longevity of the evergreens is a result of continued use of potable water for irrigation.

• The street trees along Speer Boulevard are also an important component of the original historic design. The original spacing of the street trees is significantly tighter than what is currently permitted, and as a result, the tree roots are starting to heave the overlying pavement, which creates maintenance and pedestrian safety concerns.

• The park contains over 12 acres of irrigated bluegrass, which requires a significant amount of water as well as continual mowing and edging.

The DPR GIS inventory contains the quantity, size and condition of the trees and can be easily accessed and updated. The City Forester updates condition information on a four-year cycle utilizing on-call arborists, and information regarding the Sunken Gardens inventory is anticipated to be completed within the next year.

Topography and Drainage

Topography is a critical feature of Sunken Gardens and contributes to important views into the park and defines the character of the two major zones: The formal northern zone and the more relaxed or rustic southern zone. Historically, these zones have offered distinctly different experiences, which continues to be true even after the loss of historic structures. The steep side slopes framing the formal terraced lawn and pools in front of the DPS campus contrast with the gently sloping natural character of the southern zone of the park that culminates with a meandering linear swale.

The topography of the northern section was conducive to an open expansive area suitable for a reflecting pool and formal gardens, neither of which currently exist except for the structural edge of the pool. This edge serves as a topographic feature and provides a step and or seat surrounding the lawn and playfield.

Water was a critical component in the original design of Sunken Gardens Park and served as the primary feature for both the northern and southern sections of the park. The remnants of those design elements inform existing topographic features of the park that current users utilize. Both the open lawn area and the drainage swale sit as much as 10 feet below street level, and it is this depression that results in both memorable views and distinctive spaces within the framework of the park.
The southern section of the park does not offer expansive views; the space is inwardly focused with "undulating terrain and evergreen groves suggesting a forest glen.\textsuperscript{,} per descriptive text from the 1967 Nomination Form submitted to the National Register of Historic Places.

"The relationship between West High School, Speer Boulevard, and Sunken Gardens Park remains integral to any discussion of the site. Sunken Gardens serves as a forecourt to the West High School and the school as a backdrop to the park. Sunken Gardens also reinforces and enhances the boulevard experience desired along Speer."\textsuperscript{2003 Sunken Gardens Master Plan}

In both cases the planting scheme reinforces the historic spatial configuration.

LEGEND:
- **DECIDUOUS TREES**
- **EVERGREEN TREES**
- **ORNAMENTAL TREES**
TERRAIN DEFINES THE MORE NATURAL CHARACTER OF THE GROVES

NORTH- STEEP, ARCHITECTURAL SLOPED EDGES FRAME THE FORMAL TERRACED LAWN

IN BOTH CASES STORM DRAINAGE WILL BE A DESIGN RESOURCE.

LEGEND:

- OUTLET STRUCTURE
- STORM INLETS
- STORM LINES
- SWALE FEATURE
- LOW AREA
- CHERRY CREEK

TOPOGRAPHY DEFINES THE CHARACTER OF THE TWO MAJOR ZONES:

SOUTH- GENTLY SLOPING UNDULATING TERRAIN DEFINES THE MORE NATURAL CHARACTER OF THE GROVES
Levels of Service, Maintenance and Operations Assessment

Note Regarding COVID19

Just prior to initiating the 2020 Sunken Garden Master Plan, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a mandatory city and state issued stay-at-home order that immediately impacted access and use of Denver Parks.

Although formalized, permitted use of Sunken Gardens Park facilities such as the playfield and the picnic area were immediately stopped, local residents and employees continue to use the park for informal small group gatherings and individual respite. Denver Health employees have been observed using the perimeter paths, young couples are using structural remnants of the reflecting pool for seating and sunbathing, and children climb pavilion steps and edges of the platform.

While active, structured uses in the park may have changed due to the pandemic, the number of users and the patterns of uses observed during the pandemic reflect the important role that neighborhood parks play in the daily health and well-being of Denver residents. The park has been busy – people of all ages are seeking open, unplanned green space during the pandemic.

Formal observations of typical user trends were not conducted in conjunction with this assessment. Permitting data for both the playfield and the picnic area was reviewed, and anecdotal evidence from city staff has been compiled and will inform the next phase of the planning process.

As the project progresses, both Advisory Committee members and stakeholders will be asked to contribute information pertaining to user trends, and this information will be included in subsequent deliverables.

Levels of Service

Sunken Gardens is on the boundary between the La Alma/Lincoln neighborhoods and Civic Center/Golden Triangle neighborhoods; as delineated on the Levels of Service Diagram, it is ten minute walk from both Kalamath Street in the Lincoln neighborhood, from the Santa Fe Arts District and also from the east side of Speer Boulevard to Sunken Gardens Park.

While The Game Plan seeks to provide each neighborhood with a neighborhood park within a 10 minute walkshed, it is important to note that a fifteen minute walk connects Sunken Gardens Park to Lincoln/La Alma Park and the La Alma Recreation Center, Civic Center Park, City Hall and the State Capitol and the Broadway and Lincoln commercial corridors in the Civic Center neighborhood. Sunken Gardens’ location is an important attribute in understanding the park’s potential as a neighborhood park.
Conversely, The Downtown Outdoor Plan recommends that neighborhood parks should be accessible within a 5-minute walkshed (Recommendation 2.1.2), which highlights the importance of Sunken Gardens Park in the city’s evolving neighborhood park inventory.

**Equity Index**

The City and County of Denver has advanced tools to ensure equitable distribution of parks and recreational opportunities and as stated in the Game Plan, one of the (4) Guiding Principles is to “ensure equity in the distribution of parks, park resources and programming so that all residents have the opportunity to improve their personal health and well-being”.

The Denver Neighborhood Equity Index identifies neighborhoods “where residents face the highest hurdles to leading healthy lives. The Built Environment Sub-index is calculated by equally weighting the rankings of Education and Poverty indicators. On a scale of 1 to 5, La Alma/Lincoln Neighborhood ranks a 4 for Access to Parks measured as a % of living units within a ¼ mile walk to a quality park or open space, Civic Center/Golden Triangle neighborhood ranks a 5. While the equity index for park access may be higher than other neighborhoods, park facilities including recreational facilities and programming will be discussed in detail with the Advisory Committee and Stakeholders to ascertain the specific needs and desires of local residents and the community.

**Permitting**

Permitting information was compiled and reviewed for (2) locations within the park: the picnic area adjacent to the playground and the playfield.

In 2018, 23 permits were issued for park use; 78% of the permits were for the playfield and 22% of the permits were for the picnic area. The size of the events ranged from 25 to 100 persons for the picnic area and 30 to 199 persons for the playfield. The event attracting the most participants was Yoga Rocks the Park, which requested a permit for 199 persons.

In 2019, 19 permits were issued for park use; 63% of the permits were for the playfield and 37% of the permits were for the picnic area. The size of events ranged from 10 to 100 persons for the picnic area and 30 to 300 persons for the playfield. Yoga Rocks the Park attracted the most participants, and requested a permit for 300 persons, reflecting a 33% increase from 2018.

**Public Safety**

Between January 2015 and May 2020, no police reports have been logged for incidents in Sunken Gardens Park. Six incidents have required police presence on the Denver Public Schools campus and 60 incidents have required police presence at or near Denver Health.

**Maintenance and Operations**

As a neighborhood park, Sunken Gardens service level classification is Level Blue, which is based on the National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) “Park Maintenance Standards” that has been adopted by DPR. Level Blue includes maintenance operations that are primarily associated with neighborhood parks, parkways and Tier B and C athletic fields, with the primary goal being to achieve a neat and orderly appearance with some tolerance for effects of wear and tear. Maintenance is of moderate to low intensity and frequency with an emphasis on controlling deterioration and adapting the site and vegetation to accommodating routine activities.
Shop and Maintenance Yard

The current shop and yard serve an important function in the day-to-day maintenance operations, including the storage of equipment and structural elements. While other proximate maintenance facilities such as Elitch’s and the 14th/Delaware Post Office site support current operations, these sites do not provide adequate space for outdoor storage, materials storage, and parking.

Standard park maintenance also includes monitoring of the existing, extensive irrigation system, and maintenance of the perimeter sidewalks and internal trails, including snow removal.

- **Neighborhood Interface**
  Residents living along the Elati Street between West High School and 9th Avenue play an important role in identifying and communicating maintenance needs to DPR. While approximately 80% of all maintenance-related calls are routed through 311/Denver Pocket Gov, it is estimated that 20% of calls targeting Sunken Gardens maintenance needs are conveyed directly to DPR maintenance crews by local residents.

- **DeBoer Swale**
  The existing swale which runs north/south and is a remnant of the DeBoer Waterway, tends to capture on-site stormwater which delays routine mowing maintenance a few times per year. The large boulders that are also remnants of the Waterway require “stringing”.

- **Irrigation**
  The irrigation system currently relies on the city system. There is an underground irrigation pump, but it is believed that the pump was shorted out during a flood event and has not been operational since 2006. Maintenance crews subsequently located and opened gate valves, which has created a true loop system which utilizes potable water from the city. Irrigation laterals are aging and require ongoing repair.

- **Walkways**
  The sidewalk that parallels Speer Boulevard creates both pedestrian safety and maintenance hazards due to the heaving of concrete resulting from mature tree roots. This also creates challenges in snow removal.

- **Emerging Trends**
  Recent increases in redevelopment and residential densities in both the Golden Triangle, Baker and Lincoln neighborhoods have resulted in increased number of dogs, on and off leash.

- **Programmed Athletic Field**
  The existing athletic field located in the center of the old reflecting pool is a permitted field that is utilized by multiple user groups but does not create maintenance issues.
Neighborhood Assessment

Introduction

For more than a hundred years, the nearby Burnham Yards railyard provided many jobs that supported the build-out of the diverse, working class neighborhood surrounding Sunken Gardens. However, beginning in the 1940s, the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood’s dominant population -which has self-identified over decades as Raza, Mestizos, Aztecas, Mexican-Americans, Mexicanos, Latinos, Latinx and Chicanos 1- experienced widespread disinvestment in their community, with city government sanctioned-redlining. In 1969, the voter-approved demolition of the neighboring and equally diverse Auraria community saw many displaced Aurarians finding a new home in the already densely populated La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood.

This same year, the Chicano Rights Movement – “El Movimiento” – was taking hold in Denver. El Movimiento was a reclamation of cultural identity, building on the energy and efforts of national labor and land rights activism, the Civil Rights movement, education and social equity demands, the fight against police brutality, and in the work of the neighborhood’s own mutualistas, or mutual aid societies. The “West High Blowouts,” organized by students and Chicano rights group Crusade for Justice in response to racial discrimination of Mexican and Chicano students by teachers and administrators at West High School, brought Sunken Gardens into the fold as one of several geographical sites for El Movimiento. Many crucial political and social actions took place in the neighborhood, leading to the development of and continued support for present day community institutions such as La Alma Recreation Center, Su Teatro, Museo de las Americas, the Aztlán Theatre and Denver Inner City Parish, as well as the preservation of important work by Chicano muralists from the movement. Through a Denver City Council vote in 2013, the Lincoln Park neighborhood was officially renamed La Alma Lincoln Park. The addition of La Alma -- meaning “the soul” in Spanish -- serves as a reflection of the community’s chosen name for the neighborhood. Known for decades informally as La Alma, the name change honors the reclamation and celebration of the neighborhood’s roots, and the lasting impacts of El Movimiento.

A gem of Denver’s oldest neighborhood and one of few greenspaces in the original West Side, Sunken Gardens has long been an underutilized but important place in Denver’s nationally recognized parks and parkways system. From the City Beautiful movement to El Movimiento through to today, Sunken Gardens is both a place of respite and exercise for current day Denverites and an unheralded player in the City’s history.

Neighborhood Assessment Boundaries

The Neighborhood Assessment tells the story of who lives, works, and visits the neighborhood in proximity to Sunken Gardens. The primary area, the area most likely to draw visitors to Sunken Gardens, is considered a 10-minute walkshed from Sunken Gardens. This aligns with a goal from the 2019 Game Plan for a Healthy City plan to ensure a ten-minute walk to a park or open space for every neighborhood. The 10-minute walkshed, pictured on the following page, touches five neighborhoods: La Alma Lincoln Park, Civic Center (also referred to as Golden Triangle), Capitol Hill, Baker and Speer. These five neighborhoods comprise a secondary area, shown on the map on page 7. Data is provided throughout this assessment for both the 10-minute walk (primary area) and five-neighborhood boundary (secondary area). Data for the City of Denver is frequently used for comparison.

1 Historic Denver – La Alma Lincoln Park

Sunken Gardens, Denver. Courtesy of DPL Western History Collection MCC-2880

Emanuel Martinez mural at La Alma Recreation Center. Photo Credit: Armando Geneyro

3.5- 10 minute walk access. Ensure a ten minute walk for park and open space for every neighborhood. Game Plan for Healthy City - Goal 3.5
Sunken Gardens Neighborhood Assessment 10 Minute Walkshed

Legend:
- **SUNKEN GARDENS PARK**
- **STATISTICAL NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY**

**COMPLETED DEVELOPMENT 2010-2019 BY BUILDING HEIGHT**
- 5-10 STORIES
- 11-15 STORIES
- 15+ STORIES

**PROPOSED OR IN THE PIPELINE BY BUILDING HEIGHT***
- 5-10 STORIES
- 11-15 STORIES
- 15+ STORIES

*Note: Development statuses are for illustration purposes and do not reflect actual building heights.

Draft
Sunken Gardens Neighborhood Assessment 5 Neighborhood Boundary

![Map of Sunken Gardens Neighborhood]

- **Sunken Gardens Park**
- **Statistical Neighborhood Boundary**

1 Mile
Sunken Gardens Neighborhood Assessment 10 Minute Walkshed

[Map of Sunken Gardens Neighborhood Assessment 10 Minute Walkshed]

- SUNKEN GARDENS PARK
- STATISTICAL NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY

0.5 Miles
Civic or Institutional Assets
1. First Mennonite Church of Denver - 430 W. 9th Ave.
2. Scum of the Earth Church - 935 W 11th Ave.
3. His Love Fellowship - 910 Kalamath St.

Locally Significant Places
1. Evans School - 1115 Acoma St. (future plans for redevelopment)
2. Denver Sports Castle - 1000 Broadway
3. Maxfund - 720 W. 10th Ave. (includes three buildings)
4. El Noa Noa - 722 Santa Fe Dr.
5. El Taco de Mexico - 714 Santa Fe Dr. (received a James Beard Award)
6. Denver Inner City Parish (outside the 10-minute walkshed at 1212 Mariposa St.)
7. La Alma Recreation Center (outside the 10-minute walkshed at 1325 W. 11th Ave.)

Arts/Culture
1. Kirkland - 1201 Bannock St.
2. Clyfford Still -1250 Bannock St.
3. Su Teatro - 721 Santa Fe Dr.
4. Colorado Ballet - 1075 Santa Fe Dr.
5. Aztlán Theatre - 976 Santa Fe Dr.
6. Museo de las Americas - 222 Santa Fe Dr.

Commercial Corridors
• Art District on Santa Fe
• Broadway Corridor

Schools
1. West High School/West Leadership Academy - 951 Eati St.
2. Girls Athletic Leadership School - 750 Galapago St.
3. Compassion Road Academy High School - 1000 Cherokee St.

Major Employers
1. Anthem - 700 Broadway
2. Denver Health - 777 Bannock St.

The area within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens is home to many assets as diverse as the residents and history of the neighborhood - from arts and cultural institutions to schools, churches, and major City of Denver employers. Culturally vibrant destinations like Su Teatro, Museo de las Americas, the Clyfford Still Museum, and the Colorado Ballet attract a variety of visitors throughout the year. From the Art District on Santa Fe's monthly Art Walks to dozens of events at nearby Civic Center Park, thousands of people are drawn to the area. Transit access, just outside the 10-minute walkshed at 10th and Osage, is a boon to both residents and visitors. Additionally, the Cherry Creek Trail serves as an important connection to the area and its many assets.
Key Findings

The following are key findings based on data from within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens and the five-neighborhood boundary, as well as, individual neighborhood data, which is found in the Appendix.

- **Rapid Growth.** While the City of Denver overall has experienced significant growth since 2010 (growing at a rate of 22%), within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens the growth rate has been even higher, at 28%. The most significant area of growth has been within the Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood, directly east of Sunken Gardens. This neighborhood grew at a rate of 50% from 2010 to 2019.

- **Chicano Roots.** Sunken Gardens is an important geographical site for the Chicano Rights Movement – El Movimiento – and the neighborhoods to the west and south of Sunken Gardens have strong, place-based connections to the movement’s legacy. The Chicano, Mexican and Latinx population (referred to by Census data as Hispanic origin) is a greater percentage of the population in La Alma Lincoln Park and Baker than in the City of Denver, at 44% and 38% respectively, compared to 33%. This population in these two neighborhoods has grown 7- to-10% since 2010. Of the 1,200 students at West Early College and West Leadership Academy, housed within the West High School Campus, over 80% are Chicano, Mexican and Latinx.

- **Major Health-Based Employers.** Some of Denver’s largest, and most well-known, employers are located within 10-minutes of Sunken Gardens, including Denver Health, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and two Denver Public Schools at the West High School campus. Combined, Denver Health and Anthem bring approximately 10,000 health-related workers to the area during the week. Denver Health sees 930,000 patient visits annually.

- **Neighborhoods of Contrast.** The two neighborhoods that primarily make up the 10-minute walkshed are those with the greatest contrasts: La Alma Lincoln Park and Civic Center (Golden Triangle). The median age is the lowest in La Alma Lincoln Park, at 29, and the oldest in Civic Center (Golden Triangle), at 39. This corresponds with the number of households with children, which is 22% in La Alma Lincoln Park and just 3% Civic Center (Golden Triangle). There is also a stark difference in median household income, which is $45,000 in La Alma Lincoln Park and more than double that in Civic Center (Golden Triangle) at $102,000.

- **Vulnerability to Displacement.** Based on a methodology from a 2016 Denver Office of Economic Development study, four out of the five neighborhoods within the five-neighborhood boundary are considered vulnerable to involuntary displacement as a result of gentrification. Key criteria used in this evaluation include the percentage of renter-occupied units, median household income,
Neighborhood Population

Population Summary:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Population Summary</th>
<th>10 Min. Walk</th>
<th>5 Neighborhoods</th>
<th>City of Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2019</td>
<td>6,668</td>
<td>46,305</td>
<td>730,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5,196</td>
<td>38,237</td>
<td>600,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Daytime Population 2019</td>
<td>21,057</td>
<td>72,520</td>
<td>897,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>18,828 (89%)</td>
<td>57,296 (79%)</td>
<td>55,5902 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>2,229 (11%)</td>
<td>15,224 (21%)</td>
<td>33,155 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As of 2019, there are 6,668 people living within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens and 46,305 people living within the five-neighborhood boundary. The population within a 10-minute walk has grown considerably since 2010; a growth rate of 28% compared to 22% for the City of Denver overall. This growth has been fueled in large part by a significant (50%) increase in the population of the Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood.

The daytime population within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens is predominately workers, 89% workers compared to 11% residents. The Sunken Gardens Park area is a draw for workers as there are several major employers in proximity to the park, including Denver Health, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield, and two schools in the former West High School building – West Early College and West Leadership Academy.

Residential Population

Demographics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>10 Min. Walk</th>
<th>5 Neighborhoods</th>
<th>City of Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 2019</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 2019</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 2019</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree or Higher 2019</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income 2019</td>
<td>$71,220</td>
<td>$56,552</td>
<td>$68,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families below the Poverty Level (2014-2018)</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with SNAP Benefits (2014-2018)</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median age in both the 10-minute walkshed and five-neighborhood boundary is 34, just slightly below the City of Denver at 35. The two areas skew slightly male, 53% compared to 47% female. Interestingly, the area within a 10-minute walk has a median household income that is 4% higher than the City of Denver but also has 47% more families below the poverty level and 61% more households receiving SNAP benefits. This is indicative of the disparity between the two neighborhoods that comprise the majority of the 10-minute walkshed: La Alma Lincoln Park and Civic Center (Golden Triangle), which is shown in the individual neighborhood data in the Appendix.

Age | 10 Minute Walk of Sunken Gardens

There is a lower percentage of children under 14 and people over 65 within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens, compared to the City of Denver. However, there are significantly more residents ages 25 to 34.

In line with national trends, the overall population is aging, indicated by the median age increasing from 32 in 2010 to 34 in 2019.
From a race and ethnicity perspective, both the 10-minute walkshed and five-neighborhood boundary are somewhat less diverse than the City of Denver overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>10 Min. Walk</th>
<th></th>
<th>5 Neighborhoods</th>
<th></th>
<th>City of Denver</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>76.20%</td>
<td>74.20%</td>
<td>81.20%</td>
<td>78.40%</td>
<td>69.00%</td>
<td>66.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>10.20%</td>
<td>10.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>9.90%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>6.90%</td>
<td>11.80%</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Origin</td>
<td>26.90%</td>
<td>26.90%</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>21.00%</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
<td>32.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That said, the culturally-rooted Chicano, Mexican and Latinx community have a strong presence in the La Alma Lincoln Park and Baker neighborhoods, which is referred to as “Hispanic Origin” in the data tables, which use Census data. 44% of the population in La Alma Lincoln Park and 38% of the population in Baker is Chicano, Mexican and Latinx, compared to 33% for the City overall. These populations have grown 7-to-10% since 2010.

**La Alma Lincoln Park has been home to a dominant and culturally rooted Chicano, Mexican and Latinx community since the neighborhood’s inception in the late 1850s. This heritage was solidified in Denver’s – and the greater nation’s – history in the late 60s and early 70s as El Movimiento took hold. Today’s West High School campus is home to West Early College and West Leadership Academy, two schools with leadership representative of the surrounding Chicano, Mexican and Latinx community, a direct outcome of El Movimiento’s work. Among the student body, 80% to 85% are demographically categorized as of Hispanic origin and 30% are English language learners.**

It wasn’t just the power and will of decades of Chicano, Mexican and Latinx people that rooted the neighborhood’s demographics. Inequitable and racist housing policies such as redlining and community-dividing transportation and highway projects further isolated the La Alma Lincoln Park neighborhood and its residents, coupled with decades of white flight from Denver’s urban neighborhoods at-large. Additionally, the demolition of the neighboring and equally diverse Auraria community north of Colfax saw many Spanish-speaking Denverites displaced and finding new homes in La Alma Lincoln Park.

**Household and Housing:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Summary</th>
<th>10 Min. Walk</th>
<th>5 Neighborhoods</th>
<th>City of Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households 2019</td>
<td>3,868</td>
<td>29,025</td>
<td>317,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,975</td>
<td>24,488</td>
<td>263,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Size 2019</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with Children (2010)</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with 1+ Persons w/ Disability (2014-2018)</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens, there are 3,868 households. Similar to the growth in population, this area has also seen a significant growth in the number of households since 2010, a growth rate of 30%, compared to 20% for the City of Denver. Households within both the 10-minute walk and the five-neighborhood boundary, have fewer children and a smaller average household size than the City of Denver.

Approximately 22% of households within a 10-minute pedestrian commute of the park include one or more persons with a disability, compared 19% of households across the City of Denver. Potential draws to the neighborhood for people with disabilities include: proximity to healthcare services at Denver Health, affordable housing with accessible unit options and dedicated senior and disability community-centered housing within the Mariposa District and **Denver Public Schools School Finder:**
neighboring Lincoln Park homes, and accessible public transit options.

There are 4,104 housing units within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens. The majority (69%) of these housing units are renter occupied, 26% are owner-occupied and 6% are vacant. Households within both the 10-minute walk and the five-neighborhood boundary have a significantly greater percentage of renters than the City of Denver.

Home values within the City of Denver have increased significantly since 2010, growing almost 70% from $250,100 in 2010 to $423,141 in 2019. Gross rent has also grown substantially, although slightly less aggressively than home value, at 50%.

Interestingly, the median home value within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens is approximately 7% lower than the City of Denver but the median gross rent is approximately 10% higher. New development in the area over the past ten years has largely been high-end apartments, with rents averaging around $2,400. In 2017 and 2018, Golden Triangle was ranked the most expensive neighborhood to rent an apartment in Denver.

House Affordability:

Housing expenditures that exceed 30 percent of household income have historically been viewed as an indication of an affordability issue. About 40% of renters in the 10-min walkshed and five-neighborhood boundary pay more than 30% of their income on gross rent. Although high, this is slightly lower than the City of Denver (and the nationwide average) of 46%. Homeowners with a monthly mortgage are less likely to be cost burdened by their housing but still approximately 20% pay more than 30% of their household income on their mortgage.

While La Alma Lincoln Park is seeing accelerating housing and rental property pricing, it is still home to hundreds of below market rate housing units. The eight-phase Denver Housing Authority (DHA) development of subsidized, affordable and market rate housing increased the original 278 housing unit development to 900 units. Between this Mariposa development and North Lincoln Park Homes, there are an estimated 600 units of subsidized housing in the neighborhood.

According data collected from the 2019 Point-In-Time survey, on any given night 3,943 people are without housing in the City of Denver. There are several service providers working directly with this population that are located within a mile of Sunken Gardens. They include: Father Woody’s Haven of Hope, Denver Inner City Parish, Harm Reduction Action Center and Denver Health. Like any other demographic living and working within proximity to parks and open space, the neighborhood’s population experiencing homelessness actively utilizes Sunken Gardens as a place for recreation, relaxation and social communing.

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3 Apartments.com
4 Robert Garrison, The Denver Channel, January 23, 2018
5 Census.gov – Who can afford housing publication
Sunken Gardens | Neighborhood Assessment

Vulnerability to Displacement:

In 2016, Denver Office of Economic Development developed a methodology for determining which Denver neighborhoods are at greatest risk of involuntary displacement due to gentrification. The three indicators used are median household income, percentage of renter-occupied units, and percentage of residents who have less than a Bachelor’s degree.

The chart below uses purple to indicate:

- Neighborhoods with a median household income less than the City of Denver
- Neighborhoods with a greater percentage of renters than the City of Denver
- Neighborhoods where the percentage of residents with less than a Bachelor’s degree is greater than the City of Denver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerability to Displacement Indicators</th>
<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$56,748</td>
<td>$45,214</td>
<td>$102,063</td>
<td>$64,831</td>
<td>$51,284</td>
<td>$68,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Renter-Occupied Units</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td>69.70%</td>
<td>66.80%</td>
<td>69.60%</td>
<td>75.90%</td>
<td>48.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Residents less than Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>36.10%</td>
<td>64.50%</td>
<td>36.30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32.80%</td>
<td>50.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neighborhoods are considered vulnerable to displacement if they have at least two of the three considerations above.

Using this methodology, four out of the five neighborhoods within the five-neighborhood boundary are considered vulnerable to displacement. All five neighborhoods have a greater percentage of renters than the City of Denver. Four out of the five neighborhoods have median household incomes lower than the City of Denver, with the exception of Civic Center (Golden Triangle), whose household income is 48% higher than the City. La Alma Lincoln Park has all three indicators, signifying that perhaps it is at most risk for displacement.

Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>10 Min. Walk</th>
<th>5 Neighborhoods</th>
<th>City of Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Businesses 2019</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>3,752</td>
<td>35,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Employees 2019</td>
<td>17,221</td>
<td>47,627</td>
<td>468,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee/Residential Ratio (per 100 residents)</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens there are over 17,000 employees and over 1,000 businesses. This area is heavily populated with employees, indicated by an employee to residential population ratio about four times that of the City of Denver.

Looking at employees by industry, the top three industries within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens are: Healthcare and social assistance (37.3%), Public Administration (13.1%), and Finance and Insurance (10.5%). This aligns with the employment numbers found at major employers in the area, in particular Denver Health and insurance provider Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield. Approximately 50% of workers in the area are employed in one of these health related fields. The magnitude of Denver Health can be seen by the fact that healthcare jobs make up nearly 40% of all jobs in the 10-minute walkshed, compared to just 12% of jobs within the City of Denver.
Based on 2017 Census Bureau’s OnTheMap, the five-neighborhood boundary experiences a significant inflow of workers. Approximately 94% of those employed in the area come from outside the five-neighborhood boundary (depicted by the dark green arrow in the diagram below); only 6% of those employed in the area also live in the area (shown by the green circle below).
Major Employers

The inflow of workers and large employee to resident ratio are due, in large part, to several major employers within the 10-minute walkshed.

**Denver Health (Main Campus)**

Located at 777 Bannock St., directly south of Sunken Gardens, Denver Health has **over 7,000 employees.** The community institution, which has served Denver for over 160 years, delivers preventative, primary and acute care services. One third of all babies born in Denver are born at Denver Health. As Colorado’s primary safety-net institution, Denver Health is a place where community members can receive hospital and emergency care regardless of their ability to pay. Denver Health also serves 207 Denver public schools.

**Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield**

Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield is located caddy corner to Sunken Gardens, east of Speer Blvd. and south of 8th Ave. The health insurance provider, which is headquartered in Indianapolis, is the 15th largest private-sector employer in the Denver area, with **2,400 employees.**

**West Early College & West Leadership Academy**

While West High School no longer exists, its campus directly to the west of Sunken Gardens at 951 Elati St., is now home to West Early College and West Leadership Academy. West Early College is a 6-12 Denver Public “Innovation School”. Students graduate with a high school diploma, an associate’s degree transferrable to a four-year college or a professional certificate in computer science and or medical fields, at no cost. **West Early College employs approximately 75 faculty and has just over 600 students.**

West Leadership Academy, also designated a Denver Public "Innovation School", offers a rigorous academic program for grades 6-12, designed to promote college and career readiness. **West Leadership Academy has just over 60 faculty and approximately 640 students.**

Visitors

In addition to residents and employees within the 10-minute walkshed, thousands of visitors come in proximity to Sunken Gardens. At present, Sunken Gardens’ modest amenities are used primarily by residents and employees.

**Cherry Creek Trail**

Sunken Gardens sits adjacent to the Cherry Creek Trail, which runs 12.7 miles from Confluence Park to Cherry Creek Lake/Reservoir. This trail also connects to a 40-mile regional trail system linking downtown to surrounding Douglas and Arapahoe Counties. The multi-use trail attracts all ages and skill levels and includes bikers, runners, skateboarders, walkers and other forms of pedestrian mobility. Based on data from 2018, there was an average bike count of 80,000 per month on the Cherry Creek Trail at Champa St., less than a mile north of Sunken Gardens.

**10th and Osage Station**

The 10th and Osage light rail station is 0.8 miles west of Sunken Gardens. This central line connects with five RTD lines between the south and Union Station. The stop ranks in the top third of light rail stations when it comes to ridership, with roughly 4,000 passengers passing through during Monday through Thursday commuter times. Its central location also puts the 10th and Osage station within just three stops of major downtown destinations such as Auraria Campus, The Pepsi Center, the Convention Center, the 16th Street Mall and Empower Field at Mile High.

**Patients and Family Members**

Major employers, such as Denver Health, are a significant draw of visitors to the area. Denver Health sees approximately 252,000 unique patients a year (185,000 adults and 67,000 children), the equivalent of about a third of the Denver population. In addition to patients the medical facility brings families, friends and others to the area to visit patients.

**Students and Families**

There are approximately 1,200 students, grades 6 through 12, attending West Leadership Academy and West Early College. The schools are “choice in” meaning any Denver Public Schools students can elect to go to either school but students without the boundaries of West get first choice, meaning most students coming from the surrounding neighborhood. School pick up/drop off, sports, afterschool clubs and other functions bring additional family members to the area.

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6 Denver Health About Us  
7 Denver Business Journal – Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield  
8 Colorado Department of Transportation Bike Ped Stations:  
9 2018-2019 RTD Rail Station Activity  
10 Denver Health Report to the City 2018
Traffic Volume

This map, with data from ESRI via Kalibrate Technologies Q4 2019, indicates average daily traffic volume in proximity to Sunken Gardens. Sunken Gardens is bound on two sides by major arterials, Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue. This section of Speer sees upwards of 60,000 vehicles per day and 8th Avenue averages between 20,000 to 30,000 vehicles per day, and is how most Denver residents, commuters, and visitors initially become acquainted with the park.

Development

The City of Denver experienced unprecedented growth over the last decade. As one of the first cities to emerge from the 2008 Great Recession, Denver began seeing construction and development projects roll out in the early 2010s.

La Alma Lincoln Park

La Alma Lincoln Park was slightly behind the rest of the City in terms of growth, with much of its new development happening after 2015. The western portion of the neighborhood is still largely devoted to industrial and transit uses, with some new commercial development in the last five years. The neighboring Auraria Campus expanded its multi-college grounds across the Colfax corridor in recent years, with construction and completion of its athletic complex and fields on the north end of La Alma Lincoln Park in 2015. Nearby, the student-oriented “co-housing” development brought more than 200 housing units in 2019, the few-if only-private sector, market rate housing on the far northwest end of the neighborhood. The south and east areas of La Alma Lincoln Park remain primarily residential. Newer, large-scale residential developments along Santa Fe Drive have occurred over the past two to three years. Modest turn-of-the-century cottages, along with one and two-story commercial buildings, have been replaced with multi-
unit mixed-use complexes, a shift correlating with rising property values around the Art District on Santa Fe. La Alma Lincoln Park’s biggest changes to its residential housing stock came from -and have been catalyzed by- Denver Housing Authority (DHA). Starting in 2012, the former South Lincoln Park Homes were razed and the Mariposa District began construction; that construction is still in process in 2020. The eight-phase DHA development of subsidized, affordable and market rate housing bumped the original 278 housing unit development to 900 units, along with additional retail and office space, which tripled the number of housing units in La Alma Lincoln Park. 11

Adjacent to La Alma Lincoln Park is the Sun Valley neighborhood is poised for significant new development including: rehabilitation and expansion of DHA housing, Meow Wolf’s 90,000 sq. ft. commercial art and museum, and the Stadium District Master Plan – which will bring new residential and commercial development to the area.

**Civic Center**

Civic Center (Golden Triangle) has seen a range of land use within its history. Unlike La Alma Lincoln Park’s industrial and residential composition, Civic Center (Golden Triangle) is more of a mini-metropolitan area within itself. A unique blend of large apartment and condo-style buildings (built in recent decades), a handful of single-family Victorian houses and duplexes, restaurants, offices, shops and services, as well as large, city-oriented buildings such as the Mint, Denver Public Library and the City & County Building. It is also home to many museums, including the Denver Art Museum, the Center for Colorado Women’s History at the Byer’s Evans House, the Kirkland Museum and the Clyfford Still.

In the 1970s and 80s, the Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood was littered with surface parking lots, carrying the scars of disinvestment and unfulfilled promises of development that failed to follow urban renewal. But by the 1990s, redevelopment and infill brought a swath of now-defining, large structures – such as the 15-story Beauvallon, the 17-story Belvedere and the 18-story Prado, all constructed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Fast forward to 2016, and another wave of large condo and apartment buildings began to fill in the many still-existing surface parking lots. Between 2016 and 2019, five new buildings - ranging from seven to 18 stories - were built in the neighborhood. These five new buildings resulted in 1,298 additional housing units, and an estimated 1,830 additional residents.

The maps on the following page show:

1. Major developments completed within the 10-minute walkshed between 2010 and 2019, as well as development in the pipeline. As of 2020, there are seven new construction projects either in the permitting phase or in development, ranging in size from 10 to 19 stories. If all are completed this could add close to 2,000 new housing units to the area. 12 As shown on the map, almost all of this large new development has taken place, and continues to take place, within the Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood.

2. **Future Place Types**, from the 2019 Blueprint Denver Plan, describe the various scales and types of development that are envisioned in Denver. The Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood is largely projected as the high-density residential area, with civic uses to the north and community corridors to the east and west along Broadway and Speer Boulevard. La Alma Lincoln Park is much more varied. It too includes community corridors, along Santa Fe Dr. and 10 Ave. It has a small amount of high-density residential just north of West High School, with the remaining residential density ranging from low, low-medium, and medium-high. The western half of the neighborhood remains largely value manufacturing, with a community center around the 10th and Osage station.

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11 The Denver Post
12 Denver Infill
Sunken Gardens Neighborhood Assessment 10 Minute Walkshed
Note Regarding the COVID-19 Crisis

While this Neighborhood Assessment was being prepared, the world was experiencing historic disruption due to the health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus. While no one can predict the future, there will be near-and long-term implications of this global pandemic.

In the near term, the next 12 to 18 months, there will continue to be a significant impact on employment, especially for those employed in the retail, restaurant, services, and arts industries. Some businesses will remain closed for good and there will be vacant commercial spaces to be filled. The market for high-end apartments may level off temporarily due to higher vacancies and there will continue to be a growing need for affordable housing. This crisis has had a particular impact our City’s most vulnerable residents and put a spotlight on national issues of inequity and the need for better protection of our City’s frontline workers. As restrictions on isolation have slowly been lifting, the population under 55 seems to be taking the most advantage of public outdoor spaces, with parks seeing increased visitation.

In the mid-to-long term, the economy will begin to rebound and recover. It is expected that the fundamentals spearheading urban growth in the area over the last decade, are likely to remain. Access to amenities within walking distance and open space/green space (such as Sunken Gardens) will likely be even more coveted. As shown nationally throughout the pandemic, younger generations have been less concerned with venturing out and will likely revert to past behaviors much more quickly than older generations, who have had more cause for health concern. Sunken Gardens is fortunate to be anchored by health-based institutions, which are one of the more resilient industries. As with any crisis, there is an opportunity for reinvention; and Denver should anticipate a surge in entrepreneurship and innovation as the city emerges from this stronger than before.
## Additional Individual Neighborhood Data

### Population Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2019</td>
<td>6,576</td>
<td>7,208</td>
<td>2,371</td>
<td>13,344</td>
<td>16,806</td>
<td>730,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4,079</td>
<td>6,119</td>
<td>1,577</td>
<td>10,954</td>
<td>14,708</td>
<td>690,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Daytime Population Workers</td>
<td>12,973</td>
<td>20,717</td>
<td>9,227</td>
<td>11,429</td>
<td>18,074</td>
<td>857,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>9,051 (76%)</td>
<td>16,688 (81%)</td>
<td>8,532 (69%)</td>
<td>7,687 (69%)</td>
<td>14,188 (78%)</td>
<td>56,5602 (63%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Additional Individual Neighborhood Data

### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median Age 2019</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 2019</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 2019</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</td>
<td>63.90%</td>
<td>35.50%</td>
<td>63.70%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median Household Income</td>
<td>$36,748</td>
<td>$43,214</td>
<td>$102,062</td>
<td>$64,831</td>
<td>$51,284</td>
<td>$60,771</td>
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### Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White 2019</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>82.6%</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black 2019</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian 2019</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian 2019</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander 2019</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race 2019</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races 2019</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Origin 2019</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
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</table>

### Household Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households 201</td>
<td>3,342</td>
<td>3,133</td>
<td>1,676</td>
<td>8,742</td>
<td>12,132</td>
<td>317,035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2,447</td>
<td>2,841</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>7,304</td>
<td>10,016</td>
<td>263,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Change</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Size 201</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>2.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>2.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Households with Children Q</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>3.20%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Housing Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baker</th>
<th>La Alma Lincoln Park</th>
<th>Civic Center</th>
<th>Speer</th>
<th>Capitol Hill</th>
<th>Denver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Units 201</td>
<td>3,504</td>
<td>3,215</td>
<td>1,873</td>
<td>9,180</td>
<td>12,754</td>
<td>337,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupied</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentier Occupied</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>69.6%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Home Value 201</td>
<td>$457,158</td>
<td>$399,688</td>
<td>$939,056</td>
<td>$404,153</td>
<td>$339,292</td>
<td>$423,141</td>
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</table>

Draft
Historic Assessment

Introduction

As part of the first steps of the Sunken Gardens Master Plan, this historic assessment summarizes the history of the park, important historic resources within the park and to explore ideas for alternative treatments. Sunken Gardens Park is listed as a contributing feature to the Denver Park and Parkway System listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Therefore, a closer look at the history of and historic resources in Sunken Gardens is necessary to determine the appropriate treatment options.

While the relationship between the park and the surrounding neighborhoods and structures, such as West High School, are mentioned and considered, this assessment focuses on the park and the key historic structures within the park. A graphic timeline supplements this text to illustrate the changes in the park over time. The timeline will be used during community outreach events to allow participants to add stories and other information to expand the story of the park beyond the construction and demolition of structures.

Historic Overview of Sunken Gardens Park

For its 110 years, Sunken Gardens Park has played a significant role in the city’s park system, serving as a neighborhood park and a green space embellishment along Speer Boulevard between 8th and 11th Avenues. The history of Sunken Gardens is defined by evolution and change as it responded to the needs of the community. Initially designed in two stages, the park’s two main sections - the northern and southern - identify two different design movements. The northern section, the first component of the park, was designed in accordance with the City Beautiful movement by George Kessler, while the southern section was developed five years later by landscape architect Saco R. DeBoer with a rustic feel. While all part of one park, these two design periods and designers resulted in a park with two very distinct sections. Many of the features incorporated as part of the original designs still survive today and convey the park’s history.

This section describes the history of the park and is outlined in the following time periods:

- 1901 - 1911: The City Beautiful Period of Influence
- 1916 - 1918: Rustic Period of Influence
- 1921 - 1939: Completing the Visions
- 1940 - 1980: Responding to Changing Conditions

Before the construction of Sunken Gardens Park, the land along Cherry Creek was a city dump. This photo shows the land a few years before construction on the northern section of the park began, 1908. (Denver Municipal Facts: Volume 4 Number 20, 1912 May 18. Denver Public Library.)

Looking west from Cherry Creek to Sunken Gardens Park, final construction efforts on the northern section of the park are underway to prepare for the summer opening of the park. The reflecting pool and wooden pavilion can be seen as key features of the park in this photo. (Denver Municipal Facts: Volume 2 Number 15, 1910 April 9. Denver Public Library.)

“Day View from Elati Street”. This image shows the original wooden pavilion structure, before it was destroyed by a windstorm and replaced with a concrete pavilion in 1911. (Denver Municipal Facts: Volume 2 Number 38, 1910 September 17. Denver Public Library.)
1909 – 1911: The City Beautiful Period of Influence:

During this initial time period, the framework for the northern portion of the park was developed by George Kessler. The grading and basic organizational structure and circulation of the park were established for the northern portion of the park during this time in keeping with the classical traditions of the period. Elements added to the park were in keeping with the “City Beautiful” movement and included a pavilion structure, stairs at the pavilion, a reflecting pool, a series of concrete and gravel pathways, set of stairs along the park’s east boundary, formal flower gardens and grassy areas, the concept for a restroom/overlook/stair structure in the embankment along Ninth Avenue, and a drinking fountain. A wooden pavilion structure was built in 1909 but destroyed during a windstorm in 1911. The original structure was replaced with a concrete pavilion in 1911 designed by Jules Jacques Benoit Benedict.

1916 – 1918: Rustic Period of Influence:

Between 1916-1918 the southern end of the park was acquired and the framework for the second portion of the park was developed. Landscape architect Saco R. DeBoer designed the southern portion of the park. In contrast to the formal layout of the northern portion of the park, the southern portion was designed to create the feeling of a woodland glen, incorporating more natural features. It included a rock garden and waterfall; a small serpentine swale connecting the northern tip of the southern portion to the rock garden, filled with water diverted from Cherry Creek; meandering paths; a footbridge; and a stone and wood rustic sun shelter.

1921 – 1939: Completing the Visions:

This period is one in which the vision for each of the park sections was completed. Historic site plans from 1926 include a majority of the contributing architectural elements to the park. However, this period is one of additional features. In the northern section of the park, the overlook/restroom was added. The southern section of the park saw the addition of a garage/toolhouse between 1921 and 1924. This original building was replaced in the early 1930s with the current maintenance building, which functioned as a garage and toolhouse, and is still used for maintenance operations today. The rustic sun shelter was also constructed in the southern portion of the park during this time period. While many new structures were added to the park during this time period, this also marks the period in which the concrete pavilion was removed. Its removal is dated after 1926 and the construction of West High School, but before 1933.

In addition to the structures in the park, it is also important to note that in 1926, West High School was constructed just west of the northern portion of the park. The construction in January 1926 significantly altered the park and its relationship to the surrounding neighborhoods. While the park continued to function
independent of the high school, Sunken Gardens became a forecourt to the school. The school also changed the views to and through the park, and views west of the park were then dominated fully by West High School.

During this timeframe, the park was fully landscaped with formal flower gardens, shrub beds and tree plantings. A rock garden was added to the southern portion of the park, complimenting the existing serpentine swale that meanders through the southern portion. The overall pedestrian pathway and circulation system through both portions of the park had been considered and designed, although its implementation continued into the 1930s.

This era in the history of Sunken Gardens Park marks the completion of the basic form of the park and its key historic structures. Based on this analysis, this time period represents the most complete synthesis of design ideas for the park.

1940 – 1980: Responding to Changing Conditions:

With the form, circulation patterns and built structures established by the late 1930s, the mid-twentieth century marked a time of transiting the park to reflect current needs. Just outside the park boundaries, the pedestrian suspension bridge spanning Cherry Creek was removed in the 1940s. In 1951, the reflecting pool in the northern section was filled with rubble and soil, replacing the pool and skating rink with baseball and soccer field. While this removed some of the original land uses and activities in the park, it provided opportunities for new land uses with the greatly expanded green space. Also during this time, the drinking fountain near the reflecting pool, the dock over the pool and the concrete pathway surrounding the pool were removed to accommodate the new functions in this main part of the northern section.

Simplifying the maintenance of the park was a key objective behind many of the park changes during this time. The formal plantings in both sections of the park, including the flower beds and the landscaping surrounding the rock garden, were discontinued in the 1950s. The 1960s saw the paving of existing gravel paths to ease maintenance. The closure of the public restroom building constructed into the embankment occurred in the 1960s, along with an end to the maintenance of the rock grotto and waterfall in the southern portion. The meandering creek bed in the southern portion no longer held water by the 1970s, and while the wooden footbridge was removed during this time period, the exact year is unclear.

Changing needs in the park called for a merry-go-round and a playground to be installed in the southern portion, and for an expansion of the maintenance garage with a storage yard and parking area in 1969 and 1970. The original playground was replaced with a new playground in 1979.

In addition to these physical changes, the latter years of this time period began to show changes in the use of the park as well. For instance, in 1969, Sunken Gardens Park became the host of a “walk-out” supporting Chicano Movement in Colorado: El Movimiento”, 2015/2016.)
rights. On March 20, 1969, a hundred students left the high school, crossed Elati Street and began their demonstration in Sunken Gardens Park. The following day, March 21, 1969, the walkout expanded, with at least 1,000 protesters supporting Chicano rights and joining the original demonstrators in Sunken Gardens Park.¹

This period was defined by physical changes - removals and additions - that responded to the changing needs of the park. New walkways emerged while others disappeared; parking along Elati Street was permitted between the park and the high school; and landscaping changes occurred, deviating from the original landscaping schemes. Despite all these changes, the original layout of the park, its key pathways and connections, and the design intent of the two park sections remained.

1980 - 2020: An Urbanizing Context:

Over the past 40 years, Sunken Gardens has continued to change use to respond to the needs of the neighborhood. While this period is one defined less by the physical changes and more by the changing needs of the community, it has seen some updates to the landscape plantings throughout the park. New plants have been added to the park over the past 40 years, although they have not been added in a planned way. This time period is defined more specifically by the active use of the park, which has accommodated changing needs for the surrounding neighborhoods. During this time period, Sunken Gardens has hosted track events² and Yoga Rocks³, activating the park and drawing in visitors from the surrounding neighborhoods. As the neighborhoods adjacent to the park - Lincoln Park, Capitol Hill, and others - continue to grow, the park continues to adapt to be a welcome host.

Best Practices In Historic Preservation

Historic resources are essential components of the park's (as well as Denver's) identity. They enhance quality of life, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability. Investment in these assets ensures that the social, cultural, and economic attraction of the city is maintained and enhanced.

Historic preservation seeks to maintain our shared history as it is expressed in the built environment. As a preamble to understanding the suggestions put forth in the Existing Conditions section that follows in this memo, this section summarizes concepts that are considered best practices in preservation among professionals in the field. While the application of these principles varies with the circumstances of the resources, they are widely accepted.

Goals for Historic Preservation

Generally, these are the goals for historic preservation as they relate to Sunken Gardens:

- To keep resources of historic and cultural value in active use
- To accommodate appropriate work that will sustain their viability
- To maintain the key character-defining features of individual resources and of the park as a whole
- To keep cultural resources intact for the benefit of future generations
- To promote neighborhood livability, sustainability, economic development and cultural appreciation

Basic Terms Applied to the Treatment of Historic Resources in the Park

When describing work that may occur on a historic resource, these four actions are often applied:

Preservation:
Preservation is used broadly to mean keeping the integrity of a historic resource intact, but it also has a more specific, technical meaning: It refers to maintaining the existing form, integrity, and material of a structure by keeping it, including its key features, in good repair.

Restoration:
The restoration of a historic resource is the process of accurately re-creating the form, features, and character as it appeared at a particular point in time during its period of significance. Essentially, this means putting things back to the way they were.

Rehabilitation:
The rehabilitation of a historic resource is the process of either changing its use or returning it to a state that makes a contemporary use possible. Rehabilitation includes preserving those portions or features that are essential to the resource's significance. It also may include repairing some features and/or constructing a compatible new addition. Rehabilitation may also include a change in use. (Rehabilitation is the primary approach for resources in the park.)

Reconstruction:
Reconstruction is the act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific time and in its historic location. (Reconstruction of some missing features may be an option for some individual resources in the park.)

Combining Actions:
While these terms for treatment are used interchangeably in informal conversation, the more precise meanings often are used when describing the overall strategy for a historic property.

**Best Practices in the Preferred Sequence of Disposition Options for a Historic Resource**

When considering the disposition of a historic resource, a range of actions may be considered. In general practice, those actions that require the least intervention with the property are preferred. This applies to a building, structure or site feature. Generally, preservation in place is best, and should be considered as the first option when it is feasible. If preservation in place is not feasible, then alternative treatments may be considered. The options described below are listed in order of preference.

1. **Preserve in Place**

The best practice is to keep the resource in its original location, because part of its significance derives from its siting and relationship to other features in the area. Using the resource for a purpose similar to its historic function also is preferred, but adaptive reuse that maintains the character while accommodating new uses is also appropriate when preserving in place. The option may also include making alterations that are compatible and that help to extend the life of a resource. Constructing an addition to a building is an example. (Preserving in place is likely to apply for several resources in Sunken Gardens.)

2. **Relocate to a Compatible Location**

When preservation in place is not feasible, then relocating a resource such that it can be reused is the next alternative to consider. This is best when the resource is sited in a setting that is similar to its historic site or that is essentially compatible with its character. (Application of this approach is unlikely in Sunken Gardens.)

3. **Document and then Demolish**

Demolition is not recommended, except when other alternatives are not feasible. If the property has historic significance, documenting it before it is removed is recommended. This information will contribute to the record of the history of the site and may provide material that can then be used in heritage interpretation programs. The level of documentation to be provided may vary, depending upon the reasons for significance, its distinctive features or the condition of the property. (It is unlikely that demolition will be appropriate for any of the historic resources in the park.)

4. **Interpret the Resource**

Interpretation may take a wide range of forms, but often includes printed and graphic material. This may be installed at various locations on a site and may appear in publications. Exhibits that include artifacts from historic resources also may be used. Interpretation may apply to a resource that is preserved, but often applies to those that no longer exist as well. (Many opportunities for interpretation exist in the park.)

**The Sequence of Preferred Treatments**

This analysis of historic resources in the park suggests a variety of alternative treatments that draw upon the best practices described earlier. These treatments are listed in the order of preference in the report. For those structures that are in relatively good condition and that retain a high degree of integrity, rehabilitation and adaptive reuse are preferred treatments.

Several of the historic resources identified in this memo could enliven the park, provide touchstones needed to ground people's experience in this place, and help it retain its unique character. For example, reusing the foundation of the early neoclassical pavilion as a staging area could help users experience, albeit in new ways, the sense of overlooking the park that the pavilion once provided. As another example, historic walkways could help define spaces for various activities and experiences in the park.

Comments on the general condition of a resource are provided in some of the recommendations. These criteria were used in making those findings:

**Good Condition:**
An element or structure is described as in Good condition when:

- It appears to be intact
- There are few or no cosmetic imperfections
This aerial view shows Sunken Gardens before the construction of West High School. The reflecting pool, formal gardens, original pathways and the “woodland glen” design are all shown. Speer Boulevard’s separated nature and the creek are also visible. (Denver Municipal Facts: Volume 8 Numbers 1 and 2, 1925 January-February. Denver Public Library.)

- It needs only minor repair

Fair Condition:
An element or structure is described as in Fair condition when:

- There are signs of wear, failure, or deterioration, but is generally sound

- There is failure of a key component or feature

- Replacement of some materials and features (up to 25%) may be needed

Poor Condition:
An element or structure is described as in Poor condition when:

- Many key features are missing

- Deterioration or damage affects more than 25% of the element or structure

- Substantial repair and replacement of key features may be needed

West High School borders Sunken Gardens Park to the west and serves as a key landmark adjacent to the park. (Winter & Company, 2020)
Existing Conditions Of Sunken Gardens Park

From its inception to the current condition of the park, the design and its overall intent remains the same. While many of the original structures have been removed and the formal qualities of some landscaping features have not been maintained, the visitor experience of two separate spaces connected by clear pathways remains intact. The following section describes key components of the park and for historic components, describes their significance, condition and potential treatment options.

Sunken Gardens Context

Sunken Gardens is located between 11th Avenue and 8th Avenue, running parallel to Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek. The park is primarily two triangular shapes with the larger portion to the north and a smaller southern portion. To the west, the park is bordered by Elati Street, which contains the majority of parking access for those driving to the park. West High School sits on the other side of Elati Street. The high school’s building and fields run the length of Elati Street. 9th Avenue and Delaware Street narrow the park at approximately the north-south halfway point. Denver Health borders the southern portion of Sunken Gardens Park, occupying the full block along 8th Avenue between Speer Boulevard and Delaware Street. Speer Boulevard, part of the original City Beautiful parkway system designed by George Kessler⁴, is directionally divided and is split by Cherry Creek and its subsequent trail system. Due to the grade separation between Speer Boulevard and Sunken Gardens, a series of small staircases lead from the park to the sidewalk along Speer Boulevard. One of the staircases in this series leads to the foundation of what once was the pedestrian suspension bridge crossing Cherry Creek.

Spatial Organization

Sunken Gardens consists primarily of two main spaces, each of which resemble a triangle framed on the east by Speer. The north triangle is framed by Elati Street to the west and 9th Avenue to the south; the smaller, southern triangle is framed by Delaware Street to the west and 8th Avenue to the south. Originally designed in accordance with the City Beautiful movement, the northern triangle retains its open concept. While the formal gardens no longer exist, the large lawn and landscaping around the edges is reminiscent of the original plan for the park, despite the filling in of the reflecting pool. The southern component of the park also retains its original character which incorporated denser, more informal landscape plantings, taking advantage of its natural setting. Despite the numerous changes to the park over its 110 year history, the spatial configuration of two distinguishable sections remains a key feature.

In addition to the two primary sections of the park, a series of rooms create an intimate experience for the user. Similarly to the experience in each of the two primary park sections, each room creates a unique experience for the visitor. These rooms can be seen in the map on page 8 and reflect historic features of the park. The two rooms in the northern section of the park reflect the former formal garden space and the former reflecting pool, separated by a berm and surrounded by trees that continue to buffer the room from adjacent traffic.

The rooms in the southern portion of the park reflect the historic design of this area as a woodland glen. The rooms are defined by the tree cover, and while the changes in vegetation since the original design may have altered the rooms slightly, the historic spaces can still be experienced. As seen on the map, the sunshade structure, serpentine swale and the rock garden are all key components to a defined room. The trees around the new playground structure are key in defining this room, although it was not part of the original design. The final room at the southwest corner is part of a gateway into the park and defined by mature and newer trees.

Another key experience in the park is the “walk in the woods”, which occurs along the internal pathway parallel to Speer Boulevard. While not a defined room, this corridor creates a unique experience surrounded by trees while still near adjacent activity.

Significance:
The original design of the park and its two main spaces are highly significant and a key component of the park.

Condition:
While some key features and structures of each of the two park areas have been removed over the years, the overall spatial organization remains in good condition, and the visitor experience of the two park sections continues to be distinct.

Treatment:
The spatial organization of the park should be preserved in planning efforts in order to reflect the original design of the park occurring in two distinct styles.

Land Use

Specific land uses and cultural traditions have varied throughout the history of Sunken Gardens park as the active and social needs of the community and users of the park, including Denver citizens and West High School students, changed. Originally, the design of Sunken Gardens responded to the need for a combination of active and passive spaces that could be utilized by the surrounding neighborhoods. Prior to the opening of West High School, Sunken Gardens offered swimming, ice-skating and space for gathering and walking. When West High School opened in 1926, the number of regular users increased significantly as it provided an important space not only for the community, but for the social, recreational and educational growth of the students. It became the school’s “front yard” and provided a landscape setting.

After 1926, many of the activities once offered were no longer available. Swimming and ice-skating were

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discontinued in 1951 when the reflecting pool was filled with rubber and soil. Water activities were replaced with baseball, soccer and other sports, as well as a gathering space for local community members.

Where the formal flower beds once were located is now another open area surrounded by trees and some low bushes. Like the large space that was once the reflecting pool, this smaller portion of the northern triangle is now primarily a gathering space, although it is also used for recreational activity and exercise.

The previous public “comfort station,” the structure built into the hill along 9th Avenue that incorporated restrooms and an observatory deck, has now been repurposed as a basketball court. The building was removed, but the court is still built into the hill. While Sunken Gardens does not contain many areas planned as active uses, the other is the large playground facility located at the center of the southern triangle. This playground contains a variety of equipment pieces for children to play on, as well as seating at the edges for families.

Other than the playground equipment, the southern portion of the park continues to reflect the primarily passive design that was part of DeBoer’s original plan. A few structures, including the maintenance building, the sun shade structure and a handful of picnic tables, dot the landscape, but the southern portion largely remains open. Small remnants of the original rock garden remain, but this space is now more open than it originally appeared and functioned.

Significance:
While historic uses throughout the park were originally key to the park’s design and operation, the current land uses are not significant.

Condition:
The changing land uses in Sunken Gardens over its hundred year history reflect the changing needs of the park. However, this also means that the condition of the original land uses, including swimming and ice skating, flower gardens and a rock garden, is poor. While remnants of some original land uses still exist, many can no longer be interpreted due to the current park landscaping and structures.

Treatment:
A variety of land uses could be explored for the future of the park, many of which could assist in interpreting original features. Some specific uses to explore include:

- Reintroducing a water element to the former reflecting pool and ice skating rink
- Reintroducing flower gardens (formal or informal)
- Incorporating new recreational equipment vs. leaving the park open to a variety of uses
- Exploring outdoor teaching opportunities such as demonstration gardens, archaeology, park planning, horticulture, etc. for both the school and the community

The grade change from the adjacent neighborhoods is a key feature of the park that should be maintained. A further grade change from the path to what used to be the formal gardens is also a key feature to preserve. (Winter & Company, 2020)

The photo above shows the swale that is a highly significant component of the southern portion of the park. Although it is no longer filled with water, this swale continues to contribute to the woodland glen feel of the southern portion’s design. (Winter & Company, 2020)

Recently planted trees at the corner of Speer and Delaware Street will dampen vehicle noise from the heavy traffic along 8th Avenue once mature. These will then contribute to the original wooded design intent for the southern portion of the park. (Winter & Company, 2020)
Topography

In their design of the park, Kessler and DeBoer successfully articulated the natural depression in the park space to respect the existing topography and create a well-defined space.

The embankments that define the park edges are dotted with a series of historic staircases to ease in accessing the park. On the western side, the grand staircase descends from Elati Street to what was once the pavilion and then further down into the park. While the embankment along the eastern side of the park is not as dramatic in grade separation from the western side, a series of small, historic staircases connect the park visitor to the perimeter path along Speer.

In addition to the sunken character of the park, the serpentine swale in the southern portion of the park is a significant part of the natural design of the southern portion. While it once was part of the streamlet leading to the rock garden and waterfall, the swale contributes to the meandering character of the southern portion of the park. This serpentine swale should be maintained in future planning efforts.

While easily crossed without the use of stairs, the berm separating the two rooms in the northern section of the park, as shown in the map on page 8, creates the feeling of entering a new space.

Significance:
The park’s topography is reminiscent of the original design for both the northern and southern sections and is highly significant.

Condition:
The grade changes throughout the park remain in good condition.

Treatment:
The topography throughout the park should be preserved to continue to reflect the historic design of the northern and southern sections.

Views

Historically, views to, through and from the park were key features. Some views have changed over time due to changes in vegetation and construction of new, taller buildings near the park. However, maintaining as many key views as possible is key to preserving the character of Sunken Gardens. Within the park, the views between the northern and southern portions are key to supporting a singular, connected park, despite the varied character of the sections. This view exists along the pathway that connects the two spaces, and also typically occurs when standing in the central part of either portion. However, the fence addition to the maintenance building currently obstructs this view.

Also from within the park is the key view to West High School when standing on the internal pathway or...
perimeter pathway along Speer Boulevard. While this view once included the pavilion, it now focuses on the high school. From the other perspective, when standing on the west side of the park at the pavilion base, the viewer can look out to Speer and beyond. This view once allowed a visitor to view the capitol building in the distance. Another view looking out from the park to the neighborhood is what once was titled the observatory deck, which was on top of the “comfort station”. While this building no longer exists, the views from the same spot are available, if the visitor stands on 9th Avenue and looks north over the park. Key views are noted in the map on page 8.

Significance:
The views to, through and from the park are significant.

Condition:
The historic views from and through the park are in poor condition due to a change in structures and matured landscaping in the park.

Treatment:
Consider incorporating interpretive features to highlight original views to capitol building, and other views through the park.

Vegetation

Areas that were once open and sunny now may be shaded and cooler. Historic understory plantings chosen for sunny locations may no longer be appropriate due to shade generated by what are now mature trees. Vegetation throughout the park impacts the views within the park and views to and from the park.

While the formal gardens were once a key feature and exhibited an “ever-changing” garden design that was part of the City’s “flower trail” through a series of parks, they were likely removed due to maintenance and labor costs.

While not as formal in nature, flower beds in the southern portion of the park were also removed. Despite their removal, the southern portion remains more dense in its plantings, a key component of the original character of this area.

Significance:
While some historic vegetation remains and is significant, other existing trees and landscaping is not historic and therefore not significant. More research is needed to determine which vegetation is historic.

Condition:
Similarly, the condition of potential historic landscaping will be determined after further research.

Treatment:
Further research will determine the appropriate treatment for historic vegetation. Historic trees, flower beds and other vegetation that has been lost could be restored through new landscaping or reinterpreted through new features.
Numerous pathways currently lead through the park. While some of these pathways reflect the historic location of pathways, as shown in orange in the map on page 13, the majority of the historic pathways no longer exist. The current pathways respond to changing uses over time, and changing features in the park. Original pathways through the park focused on bringing visitors to the key features of the park. For instance, a pathway surrounded the reflecting pool and drew visitors around and through the formal gardens north of the pool. As the park features changed over time, many of the original pathways, such as the one surrounding the pool, were removed. Others were used less frequently. The current pedestrian pathways can be grouped into three categories: perimeter sidewalks providing easy movement around the park, internal circulation corridors through the park and meandering internal footpaths.

In addition to the primary pathways, there are also a series of important gateways that should be noted. While some gateways provide a grander entry experience than others, they are all key to bringing pedestrians into the park. The gateways are noted on the map and include:

- Elati Street and Speer Boulevard (G1)
- West High School to the Park (along Elati Street) (G2)
- Elati Street and 9th Avenue (G3)
- Delaware Street and 8th Avenue (G4)
- Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue (G5)
- Speer Boulevard and Bannock Street (G6)
Historic staircases along the eastern side of Sunken Gardens connect the park to a perimeter pathway along Speer. Many parts of this pathway, such as the section shown above, are in need of repair. (Winter & Company, 2020)

Running parallel to the perimeter pathway is the internal pathway along Speer Boulevard. This pathway is paved but provides a quieter experience than the perimeter pathway. While many internal pathways have changed location from the historic pathways, they are still key to circulation throughout the park. (Winter & Company, 2020)

An internal pathway meanders through the southern section of the park, passing the serpentine swale and rock garden remnants. Parts of this path may be historic. Further study is needed to confirm. (Winter & Company, 2020)

The perimeter pathway is defined by a single concrete sidewalk that runs along the edge of the entire park, above the sunken component. This pathway reflects the historic perimeter pathway as shown in the map on page 13. It provides access from the primary gateways described on page 12. While it is elevated from the park itself, connections in the form of staircases and downward sloping paths provide access into the park. The majority of this sidewalk, especially along Speer Boulevard and 8th Avenue, is in need of repairs and maintenance as many of the sidewalk sections have shifted from growing roots or have weeds coming up between sections. While in need of maintenance, the perimeter sidewalk provides access to the park and should remain a key pathway.

The second pathway type is those internal to the park that are more formal in nature. These walkways are paved and easily visible from within the park. The largest key pathway of this type runs parallel to Speer Boulevard along the full length of the park, beginning at the gateway at Elati Street and Speer Boulevard, and continuing to the gateway at 8th Street and Speer Boulevard. The other pathways in this category are focused in the southern portion of the park and connect playground, former rock garden and sun shade structure.

The final type of pathway in the park is less easily mapped. This type focuses on pedestrian-made footpaths, which are more informal in nature and not paved. These are located throughout both the north and south portions of the park, although they are more common in the northern part of the park because of the less frequent formal paths. These pathways change as the use of the park and pedestrian activity changes.

While each of these pathway types are part of the movement into and through the park, not all reflect the historic pathways and circulation system through the park. The original pathways reflected a more meandering quality rather direct paths between park functions.

Significance:
While some of the existing pathways are highly significant, others are not historic and are therefore not significant. The gateways into the park are highly significant.

Condition:
The current condition of historic pathways that remain in the park (which is few, as shown in the map on page 13) is fair. More research needs to be conducted to determine the condition of all historic pathways.

Treatment:
More study should be completed in order to confirm the original paths through the park. Any additional paths should be carefully considered to ensure they meet the original design intent of the park. Enhance the access from the school to the park, and to the adjacent neighborhoods, especially to the east and north. Study crosswalk improvements to enhance pedestrian safety.
Remaining Structures

Historically, several structures were key to the character of Sunken Gardens Park. "Structures" refers to a building, or fragment of a building, and other manmade features, other than walkways. These include stairs, building foundations and site walls throughout the park. Some of these structures remain and contribute to the historic significance of the park. The letter and number combination after each structure refers to the map on page 16.

Maintenance Building (1A)

The maintenance building is located along Delaware Street at the northern point of the southern triangle and continues to serve as a maintenance and storage building. This 1930s building contributes to the historic character of the park and is sited to stay clear of key views through the park.

The building itself is in need of repairs including the trim around the garage door, the stucco and the roof. A structural inspection of the building is needed.

While the building is sited respectfully, it currently has a large, opaque fence surrounding the majority of the building, and what has become the maintenance yard. This maintenance yard has expanded since 1966, but the fence appears to be a fairly recent addition. The fence obstructs views and access through the northern and southern triangle connection component of the park.

Significance:
The maintenance building is highly significant and a key component to the southern section of the park.

Condition:
The maintenance building is in poor condition. It needs a structural assessment and a series of repairs in order to be in working condition for any public use.

Repairs to the roof of the maintenance building are needed. (Winter & Company, 2020)

The maintenance building faces west toward Delaware Street. (Winter & Company, 2020)

The yard around the back of the maintenance building, currently blocked off by a tall, opaque fence, detracts from the building and negatively impacts the park as a whole. (Winter & Company, 2020)

A full inspection of the maintenance building is needed to determine necessary repairs. Trim around the garage door and stucco repair are some initial repairs that will need to be completed in order for the building to be reused. (Winter & Company, 2020)
Sunken Gardens | Historic Assessment

HISTORIC AND NEW STRUCTURES MAP

LEGEND

- **Type 1** - Remaining Historic Structures
- **Type 2** - Remnants of Historic Structures
- **Type 3** - Lost Historic Structures
- **Type 4** - New Structures

Note: This map is not to scale.

Note: The location of the structures is approximate.

Type 1
- 1A Maintenance Building
- 1B Sun shade structure
- 1C Series of Stairs
- 1D Stairs to pavilion

Type 2
- 2A Pavilion
- 2B Structural edge of pool
- 2C Pedestrian footbridge foundation
- 2D Landscape features

Type 3
- 3A Comfort station
- 3B Wooden footbridge
- 3C Water fountain

Type 4
- 4A Sport court
- 4B Picnic table cluster
- 4C Playground
Treatment:
Consider potential for adaptively reusing this structure so it remains part of the key functions of the park.

**Sun Shade Structure (1B)**

The sun shade structure, located at the corner of 8th Avenue and Speer, appears to be underutilized. The structure has considerable amounts of graffiti on the stone pillar. The structural components appear to be in good condition, but the fascia boards are coming apart. They also need scraping and repainting. This process could also be applied to many of the roof beams. In order to ensure this sun shade structure is protected, the trees around it should be trimmed to prevent heavy branches from falling onto and damaging the structure.

Significance:
The sun shade structure is a highly significant historic structure in the park.

Condition:
While the sun shade structure is in need of cleaning and some repairs, it is in fair condition.

Treatment:
The structure should be preserved and repaired where needed.

**Series of Stairs (1C)**

The series of small, concrete stairs connecting the park to the perimeter sidewalk along Speer Boulevard are in varying conditions. While each staircase is usable, concrete in some stairs is crumbling; weeds are growing between stairs in others; and one staircase is being used as an art canvas. It is also unclear if the staircases are used, as they do not connect to the formal path within Sunken Gardens park.

The condition of each staircase varies, although most need some repair. Some, such as the one above, have also been used as art canvases in recent years. (Winter & Company, 2020)

The sun shade structure located near the 8th and Speer gateway is in decent condition, but in need of some cleaning and repairs. (Winter & Company, 2020)

Graffiti removal is needed on the sun shade structure. (Winter & Company, 2020)

Historic staircases connect the park to the pathway along Speer Boulevard, and further emphasize the sunken character of the park. (Winter & Company, 2020)
Significance:
The series of concrete stairs along the eastern edge of the park is highly significant.

Condition:
The condition of each of the stairs differs. In general, these stairs need some repair and cleaning, but are in fair condition.

Treatment:
Preserve the stairs and repair to ensure pedestrian safety.

Stairs to Pavilion (1D)
The stairs leading from Elati Street to the base of the pavilion were part of the original design of the northern section of the park, as seen in the bottom image on page 1. Throughout the many changes the park has undergone over the past 110 years, these stairs have remained a key point of entry into the park.

Significance:
These two staircases are highly significant.

Condition:
The stairs are in fair condition. Some repairs are needed, but they are frequently used and part of a key gateway into the park.

Treatment:
The two historic staircases should be preserved. They should be examined for any necessary repairs to ensure the safety of the visitors.

Remnants of Historic Structures
In addition to the structures that remain intact, remnants of other structures survive. These remnants continue to play an important role in the views through the park, and the experience of the visitor, and contribute to the historic significance of the park. The letter and number combination after each structure refers to the map on page 16.

Pavilion (2A)
The pavilion that once sat on the western edge of the northern portion of the park was the largest structure and most iconic in the series of buildings that once dotted the Sunken Gardens landscape. It is believed that once West High School was constructed in 1926, the pavilion was demolished in order to increase the connectivity between the park and the high school.

While the pavilion was removed, the structure's base still remains and is a key point of entry into the park. For the visitors that park along Elati Street, descending the two staircases to enter Sunken Gardens along what once was the reflecting pool is a common point of entry. The pavilion base itself is in fair condition, although the concrete pillar bases, edging and staircases are all that remain. The remnants are still a key part of the park, as many visitors also sit along the stairs or the wall of the structure.
Significance:
The base of the pavilion, the remaining component of the concrete pavilion, is a significant feature of the park.

Condition:
Although the base of the structure remains and is in fair condition, the pavilion itself is missing.

Treatment:
The base of the structure should continue to be preserved. Consider ways in which the base could be adaptively reused or could be interpreted through new wayfinding materials. Ensure the safety of park visitors in determining a future use of the pavilion.

**Structural Edge of Pool (2B)**

The structural edge of the reflecting pool, located to the east of the former concrete pavilion, remains a defining feature of the northern section of the park. While it does not sit above the grass, it serves as a reminder of the original pool size and importance in the park, and should be preserved.

Significance:
While the reflecting pool was filled in over 50 years ago, the structural edge of the pool, which now sits level with the ground, is highly significant.

Condition:
The structural edge of the pool is in poor condition and needs repair.

Treatment:
Study the structural edge of the pool more to determine whether it should be incorporated into a future use. The safety of the park visitor should be the priority. Treatment options may include preservation of the structural edge, but may also include a reinterpretation of the historic feature.

**Pedestrian Footbridge Foundation (2C)**

Just outside the park, a pedestrian suspension bridge crossing Cherry Creek was once an important link to the adjacent neighborhoods. One of the historic staircases that connects the perimeter path along Speer Boulevard to Sunken Gardens leads to what once was the pedestrian footbridge. However, only the base of the footbridge remains on either side of Cherry Creek. The concrete of each base is crumbling and in need of structural repairs if it were to be reused. Currently, the remnants of these bases create a safety concern as the steps lead to a steep drop off into the Cherry Creek trail culvert.

Significance:
While not a feature within the park, the pedestrian footbridge was significant in that it connected pedestrians from neighborhoods to the east to the park.

Condition:
Although the footbridge foundation remains, the bridge itself is missing.
Treatment:
Consider incorporating an interpretive feature to provide information about the bridge. The base also needs to be analyzed for safety and any future use should reflect safety recommendations.

Landscape Features (2D)

In addition to the structures that were once part of Sunken Gardens Park, a few key original landscape features have been lost over the years. In the southern portion of the park, what now appears as a few rocks along 8th Avenue was once an extensive rock garden that incorporated a waterfall, stream and wooden footbridge. While the original waterfall and rock garden are still reflected in the topography of the area, few other characteristics remain. While this area is now dry, historically, water was diverted from Cherry Creek to create the streamlet through the park. These features significantly contributed to the design of the southern portion of the park.

Significance:
The rock garden, waterfall and stream are highly significant to the original park design. The meandering swale through the southern portion of the park is also highly significant.

Condition:
The condition of these landscape features vary. The serpentine swale still exists and is in good condition. While remnants of the rock garden still exist, they are in poor condition and nowhere near the original design. The waterfall is now missing.

Treatment:
Consider reconstructing or reinterpreting this feature.

Lost Structures

While remnants remain of the majority of the structures that were once part of Sunken Gardens, a few structures have been completely lost as the park has changed. No evidence remains for most of the structures in this category, although some evidence remains of the historic “comfort station.” The letter and number combination after each structure refers to the map on page 16.

Comfort Station (3A)

The comfort station, which also served as an overlook, was built into the embankment along 9th Avenue. While the cut out remains from this structure, the restroom building no longer remains. Instead, this cut out space is now used as a basketball court. This concrete area is in need of serious maintenance if it is to continue functioning as a sport court. The concrete walls are crumbling and being used for graffiti, and the basketball hoop itself is missing. Safety concerns have also been raised about this structure due to the height between the path along 9th Avenue and the base of the court. Overall, this structure is a noncontributing component of the park and detracts from the original park features and intent.
Significance:  
The comfort station was somewhat significant to the park design.

Condition:  
The comfort station building is missing, although the observatory deck component of the building overlooking the park remains and is in fair condition.

Treatment:  
Consider other uses for what was once the comfort station and is now a ball court.

**Wooden footbridge (3B)**

The original design of the southern end of the park contained lush vegetation, a rock garden, waterfall and a wooden footbridge. This footbridge that was once part of the circulation system in the park was demolished.

Significance:  
The wooden footbridge was a significant component to the design of the southern portion of the park.

Condition:  
The wooden footbridge is missing.

Treatment:  
Consider reconstructing the wooden footbridge or incorporating an interpretive feature.

**Water Fountain (3C)**

Historically, a drinking fountain was located on the north end of the park, just to the north of the formal gardens and the entrance from Elati Street and Speer Boulevard. This fountain was part of the 1926 park plan.

Significance:  
The water fountain was significant to the original design of the northern section of the park.

Condition:  
The water fountain is missing.

Treatment:  
Consider incorporating in an interpretive feature.

**New Structures**

Non-contributing structures have been added to the park in recent years. While these structures expand the available functions of the park, they detract from the original design of the park.

**Sport Court (4A)**

The sport court took the place of the former comfort station, built into the embankment along 9th Avenue. The sport court contains a basketball hoop, although the hoop is missing.

Significance:  
The sport court is not significant to the park.
Initial Recommendations

From the existing study of the historic elements of Sunken Gardens Park – its history, former and existing structures, and the landscape – there are a variety of ideas to explore for the future of the park that would reflect and respect its history. Before these are formalized as recommendations, community input is needed regarding role of Sunken Gardens Park for the next 20/30/50 years. Initial recommendations and ideas to explore include:

- Maintain the two distinct sections of the park, as well as the defined "rooms", to emphasize the unique character of the variety of spaces throughout the park.
- Incorporate wayfinding and interpretive markers throughout the park and locate them at gateway and other key pedestrian points throughout the park. These could incorporate historic photos to show historic structures that have since been demolished and views that no longer exist because of matured landscaping and new construction.
- Repair the sun shade structure and remove graffiti.
- Consider ways to reuse or reinterpret the base of the concrete pavilion, while maintaining it as a key gateway into the park.
- Consider ways to reuse or reinterpret the structural edge of the pool, while prioritizing visitor safety and ensuring the story of the reflective pool remains a key component of the history of the park.
- Adaptively reuse the maintenance building for a public function, after the building is stabilized (if needed) and repaired. When re-purposing this building, consider functions such as a public restroom facility or a concession stand. In this effort, the storage yard should be removed from the park and the fence removed as well to restore views through this area. Consider incorporating the storage yard as part of the function of the maintenance building.
- Re-establish flower gardens on the northern portion of the park near Elati Street & Speer Boulevard. Consider partnering with West High School students or a local university to assist with the maintenance, making it part of a school’s curriculum
- Consider restoring the sloping hillside along 9th Avenue where the basketball court is located. Other opportunities for reuse could also be considered.
- Program the park with year-round activities, events and educational opportunities. Consider planning events that reflect historic uses of the park, such as incorporating a removable ice skating rink in the original reflecting pool location
- Partner with Denver Health to create a walking program that incorporates the park’s paths in the route

Sunken Gardens | Historic Assessment

The new playground structure in the southern portion of the park expands the available park uses, but is not a significant structure in the park. Ongoing maintenance of the structure should be part of the park’s maintenance plan. (Winter & Company, 2020)

Condition: The sport court is in poor condition.

Treatment: Consider reestablishing the original slope where the sport court is currently located. Alternative uses for this space could also be considered, which may or may not incorporate the sport court structure. If the structure is to remain, repair and periodic maintenance is needed.

Picnic Table Cluster (4B)

A cluster of picnic tables in the center of the southern portion of the park provides opportunity for expanded park use. Each picnic table sits on a concrete pad, which moderately detracts from the natural slope of the land and the continuous green that runs through the park.

Significance: The picnic table cluster is not significant to the park.

Condition: The picnic tables are in good condition.

Treatment: Ensure ongoing maintenance of the picnic tables to ensure they remain in good condition and so they are as minimal of a detraction from the landscape as possible.

Playground (4C)

The playground is located in the southern section of the park, along Delaware Street. It sits in a mulched area and a variety of equipment pieces comprise the playground, which also incorporates a shade structure and bench.

Significance: The playground is not significant.

Condition: The playground is in good condition.

Treatment: Ensure ongoing maintenance of the playground structure.
Construction Demolition / Removal
Events in the Park Community Development
National Trends and Events
CITY & COUNTY OF DENVER | PARKS & RECREATION

Sunken Gardens | Timeline

1900
City Beautiful Movement
The "City Beautiful Movement" is embraced in Denver, CO

1909
Construction of the Northern Sunken Gardens Park Area
- Pavilion
- Stairs at pavilion
- Reflecting pool
- Concrete & gravel walkways
- Stairs along east boundary

1910
Skating at the Sunken Gardens pool
(photograph: Denver Municipal Facts, Dec. 24, 1910)

1911
The wooden structure of the Sunken Gardens Pavilion is replaced with a concrete structure
(photograph: placeholder)

1913
Between 1916-1918 the southern end of the park was acquired and developed.
(photograph: Denver Municipal Facts, July 1, 1919)

1916
Construction of the Southern Sunken Gardens Park Area
- Rock garden and waterfall
- Small stream-let Reflecting pool (water diverted from Cherry Cr)
- Formal flower gardens & grassy areas
- Overlook/ restroom/stair structure along Ninth Ave
- Drinking fountain

1920
Gravel paths
- Footbridge
- Stone and wood rustic sun shelter

1926
Denver West High School is constructed to the west of Sunken Gardens making the park a forecourt to the high school. The construction of this school also resulted in becoming a primary view when looking west within the park.
(photograph: Denver Municipal Facts, May 1, 1930)

1930
1933: Demolition of Pavilion

1933: Demolition of Pavilion

1936
Tool House/Garage
Sometime between 1921-1924 the Tool House/Garage is constructed

Features Constructed by the 1930s
- Maintenance building
- Overlook/restroom/stair structure
- Rustic sun shelter

Landscaping & Circulation
Park fully landscaped, rock garden added, overall pedestrian pathway and circulation system implemented

DRAFT
Pedestrian Bridge Removed
The pedestrian suspension bridge over Cherry Creek is removed.

1950s Features Removed by the 1950s:
- Pedestrian Bridge
- Hedge Surrounding Reflection Pool
- Flower Beds & Rock Garden
- Pool Dock
- Drinking fountain

1951
The reflecting pool, once a primary focus of the park, is filled in with rubble and soil in 1951, replacing ice-skating and swimming with area for baseball and soccer. (photo: DHM Design Corporation, 2001)

1960s Park Modernization in the 1960s:
- Gravel paths asphalted
- Public restrooms closed along 9th Ave
- Storage yard/parking area enlarged

1960s
A new brick restroom building is added near Speer Boulevard in 1966.

March 20, 1969
With help of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and members of Denver’s Crusade for Justice, more than 100 Chicano and Chicana students walked out of class to protest racism at Denver West High School. The students ordered in Sunken Gardens where they clashed with the police. (photo: Sanchez, Hayley. "Chicano Progress Today Owes Much to the Denver West High Blowouts of 50 Years Ago." CPR News 2019 March 18.)

1970s
Parking along Elati Street was added. (photo: Google Earth 2019)

1980s
Neighborhood Playground Installed (1979)

Footbridge Removed

Hedge Landscape Removal
Hedge surrounding reflecting pool is removed.

Merry-Go-Round Construction
To further add to the modernization of city life the addition of a merry-go-round was included in the Southern portion of the park.

Features Removed by the 1950s:
- Pedestrian Bridge
- Hedge Surrounding Reflection Pool
- Flower Beds & Rock Garden
- Pool Dock
- Drinking fountain

1950s

Features Removed by the 1960s:
- Gravel paths asphalted
- Public restrooms closed along 9th Ave
- Storage yard/parking area enlarged

1960s

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- Hedge Surrounding Reflection Pool
- Flower Beds & Rock Garden
- Pool Dock
- Drinking fountain

1951

The reflecting pool, once a primary focus of the park, is filled in with rubble and soil in 1951, replacing ice-skating and swimming with area for baseball and soccer. (photo: DHM Design Corporation, 2001)

1960s

Park Modernization in the 1960s:
- Gravel paths asphalted
- Public restrooms closed along 9th Ave
- Storage yard/parking area enlarged

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