Denver is Changing - FAQs & Definitions

FAQs

1. Why are people moving to Denver?

Urbanization (people moving to cities) is a worldwide phenomenon, and Denver is a great place to live and to do business. The sunshine, open spaces, unique neighborhoods, sports teams, the arts, access to the world via our world class airport, proximity to the mountains and so much more make it a city where people want to live. The word is out! People are moving here by the thousands. Denver’s economy is stronger than any time in history and our unemployment rate is low.

- Why did you move here? "The outdoors! Denver is under an hour from some of the best hiking, skiing, camping, and views in the world. I see live music on weeknights, festivals and the outdoors on weekends. Furthermore, it seems like a place that people want to be, not a place you have to be to pursue your career. It doesn't feel like a choice here—I can have my cake and eat it too!"
  

- Denver ranks No. 1 on U.S. News & World Report’s list of the 2016 Best Places to Live. U.S. News analyzed 100 cities based on quality of life, job market, as well as the value of living there and people’s desire to live there. Denver had an overall score of 7.8 out of 10." (Tom McGhee, Denver Post)
  

- Millennials Continue Urbanization Of America, Leaving Small Towns
  

- “Moving vans and cars with license plates from other states are everywhere, and that isn’t a fluke. Colorado is full of people on the move. More than one in 10 Coloradans filed a tax return in 2014 lived in another county or state the year before. That's more than in any other state.”
  

2. What can be done to stop people from moving here?

City leaders cannot prevent people from moving here. In our free and open society, people can move and live wherever they’d like. There are many factors that may influence a person’s choice like cost and availability of housing, proximity to friends and family, jobs, culture, weather and more. Denver is an appealing place to live. As the population of the U.S. (and the world) increases, Denver’s population is also growing.

Attempts to limit growth can have negative consequences. For example, Boulder, has tried to limit growth through various regulations and laws which have resulted in Boulder being one of the most expensive housing markets in the country. Many people who work in Boulder, including professors at CU, cannot afford to live in Boulder. Rather, they live in outlying cities like Broomfield and Longmont, and drive long distances to their jobs, increasing traffic congestion and pollution.

- “The average list price for a four-bedroom, two-bathroom house in Boulder has crossed above $1 million, a rarefied altitude that places the city among the country’s most expensive housing markets. After Boulder, the next five most expensive cities for four-bedroom homes in Colorado are Castle Rock at $666,859; Evergreen at $661,000; Westminster at $561,762; Denver at $442,575 and Broomfield at $527,809.”
  

3. Why is housing so expensive?

There is not enough housing to meet the demand of our growing population. When demand exceeds supply, prices go up.

- “Denver-area apartment rents are forecasted to rise 11.2 percent this year, the biggest percentage gain projected for any U.S. city, according to a national report.”
  

- “Since the FHFA home purchase index started back in 1991, metro Denver home prices have quadrupled. No other metro, not even San Francisco, has managed that kind of long-term appreciation.”
  
● “A long list of maladies follows when supply chronically lags demand, Eisenberg said, and metro Denver is showing all the symptoms — apartment rent hikes that outstrip income gains, a record low number of homes for sale triggering heated bidding wars, nation-leading home price gains, gentrification in once-affordable neighborhoods and widespread scraping.” http://www.denverpost.com/2016/05/19/colorado-population-growth-far-outstripped-new-housing-census-says/.

4. Why are so many apartments being built?
There is a housing shortage in Denver, the metro area and state-wide. Apartments are being built to meet the demand for more housing.
● “Apartment demand shows lots of momentum near the city core, spurred by the favorable demographics of ages 20-35. It’s creating huge demand for apartments close to shops, restaurants and offices with public transportation nearby. They prefer a walkable area and are far less likely than older groups to buy their own homes, favoring to rent apartments instead,” http://www.thedenverchannel.com/sponsor-generated-content/denvers-real-estate-market-is-hot-right-now-allante-properties.
● The state is about 55,000 homes and apartments short of what it needs based on population growth. http://www.denverpost.com/2016/05/19/colorado-population-growth-far-outstripped-new-housing-census-says/.

5. What is affordable housing?
When households spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing, they are cost-burdened and don’t have enough money to cover other costs like transportation, food and utilities. Today in Denver, more than ¼ of all households are cost-burdened, including teachers and firefighters. “Affordable housing” can help a wide range of people from homeless to middle class households. There are many different types of affordable options including market-rate affordable (which is increasingly rare), income-restricted apartments, housing vouchers, Section 8 housing and more. In southeast Denver, most types of affordable housing exist. For example, the Residences at University Hills and the Garden Court at the Yale Station both have a combination of market-rate units and income restricted units.

6. Why is affordable housing important?
People of all income levels should be able to live in Denver, from minimum wage earners who provide many essential services to the middle class and above. A diverse and inclusive city benefits all residents. When people live in mixed-income communities, families tend to do better economically and socially. Employers consider the cost of housing when they choose where to locate their business. When housing costs are high, businesses often choose to locate elsewhere. Also at risk is our young, educated workforce. When they cannot afford housing, they choose to live elsewhere, which has negative consequences for our economy.

Why Affordable Housing is Important (from the San Diego United Way):
● #1 Good for the Environment: In some parts of the county, teachers, police officers, nurses, and other workers cannot afford housing near their workplaces. Instead, they must travel long distances from more reasonably priced suburbs. These long commutes burn fossil fuels, produce smog, and clog roads. With adequate affordable housing, the people who make your community work can live near their jobs. This will dramatically cut energy use and pollution.
● #2 Good for the Social Structure: Communities without affordable housing quickly become segregated by income and family background. In order to promote economic and social diversity, your community needs to provide for the needs of all families. Well-placed affordable housing developments allow communities to welcome a wide range of families and to create a vibrant, diverse group of residents. When families can remain in your community, they become part of the social fabric and advance the common good. Reasonably priced housing creates stability, community and engagement.
● #3 Good for the Economy: In order to thrive, new businesses need easy access to workers. Affordable housing developments ensure that working families will remain in your community. These working families provide the labor that makes the economy grow. In addition, encouraging working families to settle in your community will help provide a growing population of students to keep your local school system healthy and strong. Reasonably priced rentals and houses will also allow families to remain in your community even when they experience temporary job loss, a disruption to the family, or an illness or other crisis.
7. Why does the City allow development on busy streets where there is excessive traffic?

Denver's Zoning Code regulates land use and development. When land owners plan to develop their property and comply with the Code, it is their "use by right" to construct what is permitted by law. If new developments do not comply with the Code, owners may apply for rezoning. (In 2015, the City Council approved only 16% of rezoning applications.) Blueprint Denver (land use and transportation guide) encourages denser development along commercial and transit corridors. When people live near transit, they tend to use it rather than driving in their cars which reduces traffic congestion.

DEFINITIONS

Area of Stability vs. Area of Change

Areas of Stability and Areas of Change are terms in Blueprint Denver, the City's land use and transportation guide. Areas of Stability are our stable residential neighborhoods where no significant changes in land use are expected. The goal is to maintain the character of these areas while accommodating some new development that maintains the vitality of the area. Areas of Change are parts of Denver that will benefit from, and thrive on, an infusion of population, economic activity and investment. These areas include the new growth areas of Lowry, Stapleton, the Gateway area, downtown, around transit stations, and along major streets and/or transportation corridors. [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

Complete Streets or Multi-Modal Streets

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work. They allow buses to run on time and make it safe for people to walk to and from train stations. [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

- "Cars have their place, but the rediscovered importance of walking and 'alternative transportation modes' will bring more people out onto the streets — allowing these spaces to serve as public forums where neighbors and friends can connect with one another." [http://www.pps.org/blog/are-complete-streets-incomplete/](http://www.pps.org/blog/are-complete-streets-incomplete/).

Denveright:

Guided by input from the community, Denveright will update the city's master plan, establish a vision for Denver and shape how our entire city evolves in four key areas: land use, mobility, parks and recreational resources. Through four coordinated citywide plans, citizens will chart the course of the Mile High City for the next 20 years. Bringing all plans together will allow the City to work together and will make the planning process more efficient. The community can share ideas online via surveys and comment forms at [denvergov.org/denveright](http://denvergov.org/denveright). Residents can also take part in community workshops and public meetings. Denveright is unlike any initiative launched by any other city. Our southeast Denver Visioning will help to inform Denveright.

Denveright task forces that include neighborhood advocates across the city will draft four plans:

- Blueprint Denver: land-use and transportation plan
- Game Plan: parks and recreation plan
- Denver Moves: transit plan
- Denver Moves: pedestrians and trails

Upcoming Denveright Community Workshops

- October 4, 7:30-9:30 am, McNichols Building (144 W Colfax Ave.)
- October 4, 3-5 pm, New Hope Baptist Church (3701 Colorado Blvd.)
- October 4, 6:30-8:30 pm, North High School (2960 Speer Blvd.)
- October 5, 3-5 pm, Jewish Community Center (350 S. Dahlia)
- October 5, 6:30-8:30 pm, College View Elementary (2675 S. Decatur St.)

For more information, visit [denvergov.org/denveright](http://denvergov.org/denveright).
Gentrification
As Denver's population continues to boom and prosper, some neighborhoods are changing, and for many lower-income and senior residents, the pace of displacement is accelerating. Facing higher rents and housing costs, residents and businesses can be priced out of neighborhoods. As the more affluent move back into the center of the city, low-income residents are being pushed farther out to the margins. This phenomenon of involuntary displacement is gentrification.

First Mile, Last Mile
The “first and last mile” describes the connection gap from public transit to destination. Denver has invested in expanding public transit throughout the metro area, yet most FasTracks money does not provide direct funding for first and last mile connections that help people get to and from the new transit stations from their home or work. Many people feel comfortable walking or biking within ¼ mile of a transit stop. The light rail is a common example: a traveler reaches their local train station, but after getting off the train has no way to access the final destination. Facilities like sidewalks, bike lanes and shuttles that connect people to transit are very important but are currently inadequate and underfunded. With first mile, last mile options, more people would use transit which will reduce traffic congestion.

Millennial
 Born from about 1982 - 2000, the millennial generation is now the largest demographic group and a major part of the workforce in the U.S. They are technologically savvy and prefer living in urban areas. Denver is a top destination for millennials.


● “Millennials are not only growing as a market, but are critical to Denver’s success in attracting new employers.” http://www.denverpost.com/2016/04/01/denvers-emerging-millennial-market-local-apartment-developer-models-its-new-urban-developments-around-younger-renters-needs/.

Population growth statistics
● Denver's population during the past five years surged 10 percent to about 700,000 making it the fastest-growing major American city after Austin, Texas, overtaking Baltimore, Boston, Detroit and Washington as it climbed to No. 19 from No. 22 in 2010. https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-09-06/ask-colorado-whether-infrastructure-spending-works.

● As the Denver population booms, the city's and state's unemployment rates remain among the lowest at 3.8 percent. This is more than a percentage point below the national average of 4.9 percent, according to Bloomberg data. https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-09-06/ask-colorado-whether-infrastructure-spending-works.

Denver Population- US Census

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City of Denver Population</th>
<th>Metro Area Population</th>
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Road Diet (Roadway Reconfiguration)
"Improved safety and congestion relief on public roadways are high-priority national goals. Innovative reconfigurations such as Road Diets can help achieve these goals for motorists and non-motorists on mixed-use streets by reducing vehicle speeds and freeing space for alternative modes. Road diets can reduce collisions, increase mobility and access, and improve a community’s quality of life. Road Diets are a safety-focused alternative to a four-lane, undivided roadway."
The most common type of Road Diet involves converting an existing four-lane, undivided roadway segment that serves both through and turning traffic into a three-lane segment with two through lanes and a center, two-way left-turn lane (TWLTL). The reclaimed space can be allocated for other uses such as bike lanes, pedestrian refuge islands, bus lanes and parking.” www.fhwa.dot.gov

Sprawl & Density
Urban sprawl is defined as low density residential and commercial development. As the number of people in a city grows beyond capacity, the local communities continue to spread farther from city centers. The negative impact of sprawl include:

- **Increase in Public Expenditure:** Increased infrastructure, roads and building costs
- **Increased Traffic:** Populations will begin to use their cars more often, which means more traffic and air pollution.
- **Health Issues:** Less physical activity caused by preference of car can lead to obesity, high blood pressure etc.
- **Environmental Issues:** Displaced wildlife

The alternative to sprawl is to increase density of development in built-up areas with convenient access to transit.

- “The alternative to sprawl is simple and timely: neighborhoods of housing, parks, and schools placed within walking distance of shops, civic services, jobs, and transit – a modern version of the traditional town. The convenience of the car and the opportunity to walk or use transit can be blended in an environment with local access for all the daily needs of a diverse community.” (Peter Calthorpe, *The Next American Metropolis*, 1993).

Streetscape
Streetscaping improves the safety and aesthetics of our streets and sidewalks. Streetscaping includes sidewalks separated from the street, landscaping, lighting, medians, crosswalks and pedestrian refuges that are essential to making people feel comfortable and safe along our roadways. When people feel safe, they are more apt to walk to work, shopping, socializing and transit thereby reducing traffic congestion and increasing community interaction.

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[Diagram: Strong Mayor Model]

**Denver's Strong Mayor Form of Government**
Denver is a strong mayor form of government where our elected mayor is given almost total administrative authority with the power to appoint and dismiss department heads without council approval or public input. The Denver City Council’s powers include: approving the budget, legislating (making laws), and approving contracts over $500,000.

**Transit Oriented Development (TOD)**
TODs are communities near light rail stations where people can conveniently access housing, restaurants, offices, stores and transit. With a housing shortage, TOD development can help solve our housing crisis while reducing traffic congestion.

- “Home buyers, renters and employers are increasingly drawn to areas with convenient access to transit and other urban amenities such as neighborhood shopping and services. At least a quarter of all housing demand in the next 20 years - some 14.6 million households - will be for homes and apartments within half a mile of rail transit stations.”
  [http://www.sustainablecitiesinstitute.org/topics/land-use-and-planning/transit-oriented-development-(tod)]
- “TOD in its modern interpretation means pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use communities that encourage residents and workers to drive their cars less and use other options, such as transit, more. They attract people of all ages, incomes and abilities because they simplify life and give people a strong sense of community. Most importantly, TODs provide people with options so they can choose where to live, work, play and mingle.”