INFILL, INCLUSIVITY, & INNOVATION:
Collaborating Toward Denver’s Next Downtown Neighborhood
CENTRAL PLATTE VALLEY-AURARIA & THE RIVER MILE

APA Colorado 2019 – Wednesday, September 18, 3:30-5:00 pm
Introductions

**Municipal Government**
- Community Planning and Development
- Public Works
- Parks and Recreation (includes Forestry)
- Economic Development and Opportunity

**Non-profit business organization** that oversees downtown business improvement districts, is a voice for private-sector businesses, and facilitates an economically powerful center city.

**Proposed mixed-use development** led by Revesco Properties
- SA+R Shears Adkins Rockmore (architecture, Denver)
- Dialog (architecture, Vancouver)
- Wenk Associates (landscape architecture, Denver)
- Calibre (civil engineering, Denver)
Introductions

Kristofer Johnson
Abe Barge

Adam Perkins

Ryan Meeks (SA+R)
Rhys Duggan (Revesco Properties)
Chris Shears (SA+R)
Greg Dorolek (Wenk Associates)
Outline

1. The Hole in the Doughnut (an unrealized opportunity)
2. “Go Slow to Go Fast” (approaching the city process)
3. Lost in Translation (interpreting plan goals into rules and regulations)
4. Are We There Yet? (next steps before construction)
5. Campfire Stories (questions and discussion with the team)
1. The Hole in the Doughnut
AN UNREALIZED OPPORTUNITY
Denver, CO

INFILL, INCLUSIVITY, & INNOVATION
COLLABORATING TOWARD DENVER'S NEXT DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
Recent Growth in Denver
Recent Growth in Downtown

- Mid-point assessment in 2017 showed actual growth in downtown over the last 10+ years has exceeded the assumptions in the Downtown Area Plan by 10-30%
Central Platte Valley – Auraria

- Bordered by I-25, Speer Blvd, and Auraria Pkwy
- Approximately 1 mile of frontage along the South Platte River
- Elitch Gardens and Pepsi Center
- Children’s Museum and Downtown Aquarium
- Multiple riverfront parks
- Two light rail transit stops (west, south, and southeast lines)
Surface Parking

- More than 2.2 million square feet of surface parking
- 50+ acres of asphalt!
Parking Madness “CHAMPION” on Streetsblog
South Platte River (1970)
South Platte River (2019)
The River Mile

- Inspired by other recent Downtown neighborhood redevelopment in Portland, Vancouver, NYC, etc.

- Dense, urban environments that also provide quality of life

- Opportunity to restore the river as an amenity for residents, employees, and visitors
THE GOAL: To Build an Urban Neighborhood to Serve Denver’s Future and to be a Global Model for Urban Riverfront Development.
Great Neighborhoods Are...

PARKS

STREETS

AMENITIES

Looking to the Future, the Denver Parks and Recreation System Must be Understood Both on its Own and Within the Context of a Changing Community and Environment

Denver Game Plan 2017

Streets Compose 80% of Our Public Space In Urban Areas

NACTO

94% of Americans Responded That Supporting and Maintaining Public Buildings Was Important to the Future of Their Community

2016 AIA Build America Summit
Plan Features

Extension of Downtown
River Oriented Development
Mile of Landscaped River Front
7th Street Bridge Connection
Two Transit Stations
Transit Plaza
Shuttle to Union Station
15% Open Space
Community Center, Day Care, School Library etc.
15% Affordable Housing
$600 Million Infrastructure/Metro District
District Energy
Smart City Technology
Flood Mitigation
Contaminated Soil Remediation
Development Agreement
2. “Go Slow to Go Fast”
APPROACHING THE CITY PROCESS
Denver Planning Framework

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2040
DENVER'S PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Adopted by Denver City Council
April 22, 2019

COMPREHENSIVE

Blueprint Denver
A BLUEPRINT FOR AN INCLUSIVE CITY

Adopted by Denver City Council
April 22, 2019

CITYWIDE

downtown

NEIGHBORHOOD/SMALL AREA

INFILL, INCLUSIVITY, & INNOVATION
COLLABORATING TOWARD DENVER'S NEXT DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
Downtown Area Plan (2007)

- Bordered by several major street corridors (I-25, Colfax, Speer, Broadway/Lincoln, Park)
- Comprised of 11 distinct areas (including Central Platte Valley – Auraria)
- Includes portions of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River
- Downtown Area Plans were created in 1986 and 2007
- **Identifies recommendations that support a Prosperous, Walkable, Diverse, Distinctive, and Green downtown**
Initial Engagement with the City

- Revesco (landowner/developer) approached the City with concept of the River Mile in 2017
- Vision and direction for CPV-Auraria was very limited in 2007 and Blueprint update was in early stages
- Determined that existing policy guidance in existing Blueprint and Downtown Area Plan was insufficient to direct a project of this magnitude
Skin in the Game

- All recognized there was significant risk in the absence of clear direction
  - Developer = vague process, unknown community/political positions, schedule
  - City = missed opportunity to achieve citywide goals (parks, affordable housing, etc.)
  - DDP = missed opportunity to leverage new downtown investment
“Go Slow to Go Fast”

- Begin with a community-focused planning process to update the Downtown Area Plan and define the vision for CPV-Auraria and its place within Downtown Denver
- Revesco and design consultant team were active participants alongside the City and community
Overall Process

- PLAN AMENDMENT
- ZONING/DSG
- DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT(S)
- INFRASTRUCTURE
- MASTER PLAN
- SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS & PERMITS
- CONSTRUCTION

Timeline:
- 2017: PLAN AMENDMENT
- 2018: ZONING/DSG, DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT(S)
- 2019: INFRASTRUCTURE, MASTER PLAN
- 2020: SITE DEVELOPMENT PLANS & PERMITS
- 2021: CONSTRUCTION
Downtown Area Plan Amendment (2018)

- Approximately 14 months to complete (unanimous Planning Board and City Council approval)
- Over 20 meetings, workshops, surveys, social media, and other touchpoints for community input
- Outreach extended beyond the boundaries of area to engage surrounding communities (Jefferson Park, Auraria Campus, Lower Downtown Neighborhood Org, etc.)
Downtown Area Plan Amendment (2018)

- Established detailed goals and recommendations for future character of CPV-Auraria using the framework of the Downtown Area Plan
  - Prosperous
  - Distinctive
  - Walkable
  - Diverse
  - Green
- Included clear direction to guide future regulatory changes (i.e., zoning and design guidelines)
Blueprint Denver (2019)

Growth Strategy

Denver’s next evolution will strengthen our existing neighborhoods through carefully planned infill development that enhances the city’s unique character.

Citywide land use and transportation strategy to direct greatest amount of growth and change to higher intensity centers and corridors (70% of new jobs and 55% of new households)
3. Lost in Translation

INTERPRETING PLAN GOALS INTO RULES AND REGULATIONS
Importance of Having Everyone in the Room

- Zoning concepts required willingness from all sides to explore new ideas.
- Collectively challenged each other to find opportunities to integrate zoning with design review to get better outcomes.
- Both development and City teams understood site-specific conditions and where compromises were possible.
- Iterative process and many initial ideas were revised or eliminated after testing revealed unreasonable costs, construction, or administration.
Downtown Area Plan Amendment (2018)

Adopt regulatory tools that:

1. Calibrate intensity to be higher near transit stations and lower near the river and existing neighborhoods
2. Support desired architectural form and streetscapes
3. Encourage a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood with active streets
4. Promote a diverse community with incentives for affordable housing
Denver Zoning Code and Design Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoning</th>
<th>Prescriptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Form-based and generally quantitative...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Height, mass reduction, tower spacing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Street level &amp; upper-story setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Street level build-to &amp; transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Parking requirements &amp; location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Permitted uses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design Review with Standards & Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Oriented</th>
<th>• Generally qualitative...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building placement &amp; open space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vehicular access and parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building massing &amp; articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building materials &amp; transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scale transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Context sensitive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Intensity, Density, and Building Massing

- Density typically refers to number of units/people and intensity to physical characteristics.
- Lower building intensity does not always mean lower building height.
- Bulky buildings can have a greater impact on the public realm and views, than taller slender buildings with equivalent floor area.
Three new zone districts in the Downtown context (D-CPV-):

- **Transition (D-CPV-T)**
- **River (D-CPV-R)**
- **Center (D-CPV-C)**
Point Tower Building Form

- Community supported taller buildings along the river, but feared a wall of structures that would block sun and views.
- Revesco had experience from Vancouver (similar desire for permeability).
- Point Tower establishes a modest 3-5 story podium along the river with taller tower above.
  - **Tower Floor Plate Area**
  - **Tower Floor Plate Linear Dimension**
  - **Tower Floor Plate Separation**
Tower Size Limitation

- Tower limitation was originally set at 10,000 sf based on research from other peer cities.
- Architectural and financial testing revealed a problem:
  - Denver Fire Code requires separate emergency exit stairs.
  - Ratio of circulation area to leasable/sellable area was not financially viable.
- 11,000 sf provided greater flexibility without sacrificing original intent and was more financially feasible.
10,000 sf Limitation
Tower Size Limitation

11,000 sf Limitation
Tower Separation

- Denver currently has no separation requirements for towers other than building and fire code.
- Review of peer cities’ spacing requirements (where they exist) were generally 60-80 feet.
Tower Separation on the River

- Permeability along the river = City wanted minimum separation of 120’
- Desire for large park/plaza along the river and concern that standard spacing could result in monotonous skyline
- Led to a new framework allowing flexibility with minimum spacing in exchange for open space along the river
Tower Separation Alternative

- Zoning establishes minimum separation by right (120’) and alternative separation (80’) available through the Design Review process.
- Design Standards and Guidelines detail qualifying criteria for minimum size of open space and where alternative spacing applies.
- Design Advisory Board and City staff evaluate proposed design.
Design Quality – Concerns about Business as Usual

- Visibility of parking structures and lack of activity on the façade and near the street level
- Narrow setbacks, sidewalks, and amenity zones in urban locations (especially important with ground level residential)
- Lack of human scale architectural details
Limit the Impacts of Parking

- Require parking structures to be wrapped by active uses to increase activity and provide “eyes on the street”
- Parking **Maximum** ratios to limit the amount of parking allowed
Human Scale and Transitions

- “Residential setback” applies to street level units to provide more space for public-private transitions
- Design Guidelines and Design Review process to help create richness and human scale in architectural massing and details
Zoning Alone
Design Guidelines and Design Review
Diversity of Housing Options

- Plan guidance creates a link between increased development potential to requirements for affordable housing
  - Affordable at low and moderate incomes
  - A variety of unit types and sizes (including family-size units)
  - For-sale and for-rent units

- City was interested in creating a predictable and formulaic approach

- Developer was interested in a negotiated outcome with greater flexibility for market dynamics and phasing
Hybrid Solution

D-CPV Districts

Affordable Units Required

- Incentive (stories 6-12)
  - Build Alternative Units: 11 units

+ Citywide (stories 1-12)
  - Build Alternative Units: 3 units

= Total: 14 units
  (7.8% of approx. 180 total units)

- Zoning includes a formula-based incentive system based on height
  - 5-story ‘base height’ not subject to special requirements
  - Affordable housing incentive system applies above 5 stories

- Negotiated Affordable Housing Plan for Large/Phased Developments (>5 acres, 500 units, multiple phase, or uses City financing tools)
  - Quantity of units comparable to the formula-based system
  - Range of affordability levels, unit sizes and unit tenures (sale/rent)
  - Duration of affordability that is not less than current City policy (60 years)
4. Are We There Yet?

NEXT STEPS BEFORE CONSTRUCTION
Infrastructure Master Plan

- Defines the layout and design of roads, land dedications, utilities, stormwater & river improvements, site grading, etc.
- Involves additional staff in other City departments that may not have been engaged in earlier phases
- Can be difficult to carry over creativity incorporated into the planning and zoning process into engineering
- Requires buy-in and support from executive leadership to empower “out of the box” thinking
We Need To Get Out Of The Loop!

Parks, Streets And Amenities Are The Place Makers

Density Is Needed To Pay For And Activate These Amenities

Infrastructure Standards Can’t Kill The Places They Were Designed to Support
Proposed Elitch Circle at Cross Street, Looking North
INFILL, INCLUSIVITY, & INNOVATION
COLLABORATING TOWARD DENVER'S NEXT DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD
5. Campfire Stories

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION WITH THE TEAM
Panel Discussion and Q&A

Kristofer Johnson
Abe Barge

Adam Perkins

Ryan Meeks (SA+R)
Rhys Duggan (Revesco Properties)
Chris Shears (SA+R)
Greg Dorolek (Wenk Associates)