



Denver Planning Board
Caitlin Quander, Chair

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TO: Denver City Council
FROM: Denver Planning Board
CC: Tracy Huggins, Executive Director, Denver Urban Renewal Authority
DATE: June 10, 2024
RE: Proposed Evans School Urban Redevelopment Plan

Planning Board Finding

The Denver Planning Board is pleased to forward its finding to City Council that the proposed Evans School Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms with Denver’s adopted Comprehensive Plan 2040 and its applicable supplements. This finding is required by the Colorado Revised Statutes, Sec. 31-25-107(2). Planning Board made its finding by a unanimous vote in favor of the proposal at its regular meeting on June 5, 2024.

Background

The Urban Redevelopment Area is an approximately 0.8-acre area made of a single parcel located in the Civic Center statistical neighborhood. The property in the Area is at the northwest corner of Acoma Street and 11th Avenue. The Area consists of the Evans School, a 33,695 square foot structure completed in 1904. The building operated as a school until 1972. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1980 and designated a Denver Local Landmark in 2001.

The Area is currently zoned D-GT, a Denver Zoning Code **D**owntown – **G**olden **T**riangle district that encourages building forms that fully realize the urban character and intensity envisioned for the Downtown context.

The surrounding area includes a mix of uses including offices, multi-unit residential, mixed-use, and a density of public/quasi-public uses associated with the density of civic, arts, and cultural uses in the area.

A conditions study (referred to in state statute as a “blight study”) was conducted. The study found that there are four blight factors present in the Urban Redevelopment Area, including 1) inadequate public improvements or utilities; 2) buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live or work in because of building code violations, dilapidated deterioration, defective design, physical construction or faulty or inadequate facilities; 3) environmental contamination of buildings or property; and 4) existence of health, safety or welfare factors requiring high levels of municipal services or substantial physical underutilization or vacancy of sites, buildings, or other improvements, thus meeting the standards of “blight” as described in Colorado Revised Statutes § 31-25-101, the Urban Renewal Law.

Urban Redevelopment Plan

The proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) establishes the Evans School Urban Redevelopment Area. The Urban Redevelopment Plan is intended to promote complete and equitable neighborhoods through the following objectives:

1. To eliminate the present factors which contribute to the blight in the Urban Redevelopment Area. Such blighting factors are detrimental to the community and limit the development potential of the site.
2. To renew and improve the character and environment of the Area and its surroundings by enhancing and improving an existing historical landmark building which will prevent or ameliorate economic, physical, and environmental deterioration.
3. To encourage commercial and retail development that is socially and economically inclusive and from which the Area and its environs can draw economic strength.
4. To encourage the reuse of existing buildings where appropriate, including historic preservation and adaptive reuse.
5. To promote a diverse, sustainable neighborhood economy.
6. To encourage land use patterns within the Area and its environs where pedestrians are safe and welcome.
7. To encourage the participation of existing property owners within and adjacent to the Area in the redevelopment of their property.
8. To improve and provide for employment centers at areas proximate to multimodal transit centers and access.
9. To assist the City in cultivating complete and inclusive neighborhoods.
10. To improve the economy of the City by stabilizing and upgrading property values.
11. To achieve goals as outlined in adopted City Plans.

The proposed URP would facilitate the revitalization of the existing structure and encourage commercial and retail development that is socially and economically inclusive.

Planning Board Authority

Colorado Revised Statutes 31-25-107(2) requires that a jurisdiction's planning board or commission make a finding that a proposed urban renewal plan conforms with the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan.

Analysis of Comprehensive Plan Conformity

At the June 5, 2024, Planning Board meeting CPD staff recommended that the proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms with the adopted plans that apply to the area, including Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040, Blueprint Denver (2019), the Golden Triangle Neighborhood Plan (2014), and the Downtown Area Plan (2007). See the attached Planning Board staff report for details.

The Final Denver Planning Board Finding

Based on the CPD staff report and board deliberations at its June 5, 2024, meeting, the Denver Planning Board finds that the Evans School Redevelopment Plan conforms with Denver's adopted Comprehensive Plan and its applicable supplements.

Attachments

1. CPD Planning Board staff report

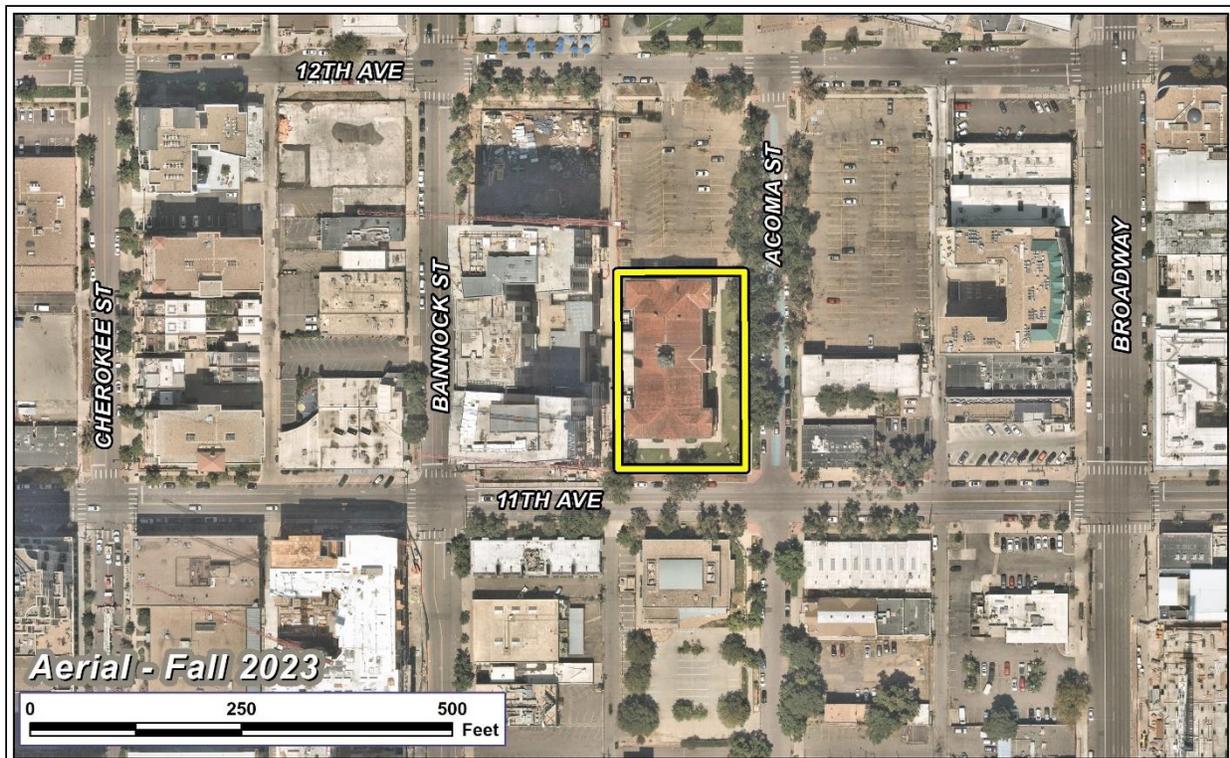


TO: Denver Planning Board
FROM: Tony Lechuga, Senior City Planner
DATE: May 28, 2024
RE: Evans School Urban Redevelopment Plan

Staff Report and Recommendation

Colorado law charges Denver's Planning Board with reviewing an urban redevelopment plan and making a recommendation as to its conformity with the Comprehensive Plan (Colorado Revised Statutes Title 31 Government Municipal § 31-25-107(2)). Community Planning and Development staff finds that the proposed Evans School Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to Denver's *Comprehensive Plan 2040* and applicable supplements and recommends that the Planning Board take formal action at its June 5, 2024 meeting to make this finding.

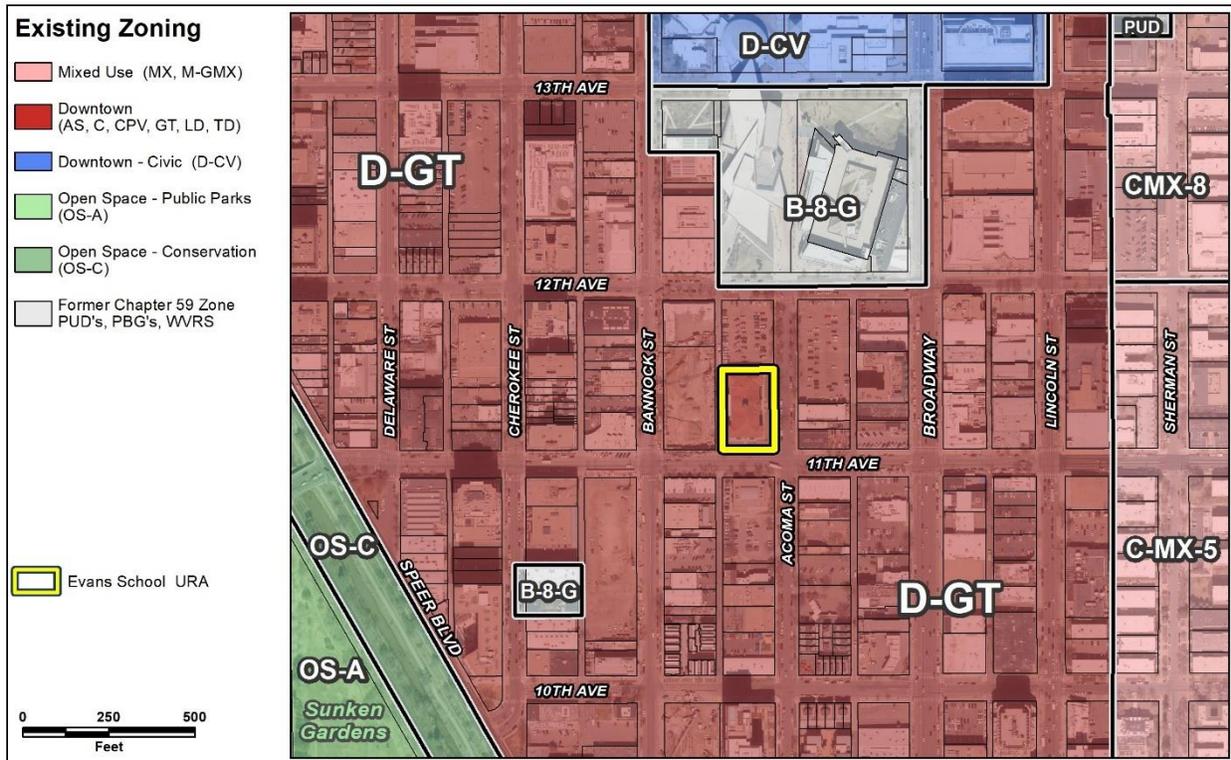
Proposed Urban Redevelopment Area



Background

The Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) is an approximately 0.8-acre area located in the Civic Center statistical neighborhood. The area consists of the Evans School, a 33,695 square foot structure completed in 1904. The building operated as a school until 1972. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings in 1980 and designated a Denver Local Landmark in 2001.

Existing Zoning



The subject area is currently zoned D-GT, a Denver Zoning Code Downtown – Golden Triangle district that encourages building forms that fully realize the urban character and intensity envisioned for the Downtown context.

The surrounding area includes a mix of uses including offices, multi-unit residential, mixed-use, and a density of public/quasi-public uses associated with the density of civic, arts, and cultural uses in the area.

A conditions study (referred to in state statute as a “blight study”) was conducted. The study found that there are four blight factors present in the Urban Redevelopment Area, including 1) inadequate public improvements or utilities; 2) buildings that are unsafe or unhealthy for persons to live or work in because of building code violations, dilapidated deterioration, defective design, physical construction or faulty or inadequate facilities; 3) environmental contamination of buildings or property; and 4) existence of health, safety or welfare factors requiring high levels of municipal services or substantial physical underutilization or vacancy of sites, buildings, or other improvements, thus meeting the standards of “blight” as described in Colorado Revised Statutes § 31-25-101, the Urban Renewal Law.

Urban Redevelopment Plan

The proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) establishes the Sun Valley Homes Urban Redevelopment Area. The Urban Redevelopment Plan is intended to promote complete and equitable neighborhoods through the following objectives:

1. To eliminate the present factors which contribute to the blight in the Urban Redevelopment Area. Such blighting factors are detrimental to the community and limit the development potential of the site.
2. To renew and improve the character and environment of the Area and its surroundings by enhancing and improving an existing historical landmark building which will prevent or ameliorate economic, physical, and environmental deterioration.
3. To encourage commercial and retail development that is socially and economically inclusive and from which the Area and its environs can draw economic strength.
4. To encourage the reuse of existing buildings where appropriate, including historic preservation and adaptive reuse.
5. To promote a diverse, sustainable neighborhood economy.
6. To encourage land use patterns within the Area and its environs where pedestrians are safe and welcome.
7. To encourage the participation of existing property owners within and adjacent to the Area in the redevelopment of their property.
8. To improve and provide for employment centers at areas proximate to multimodal transit centers and access.
9. To assist the City in cultivating complete and inclusive neighborhoods.
10. To improve the economy of the City by stabilizing and upgrading property values.
11. To achieve goals as outlined in adopted City Plans.

As outlined in the attached Urban Redevelopment Plan document from DURA, tax increment financing is requested within the project area to facilitate the redevelopment and revitalization of existing structure and encourage commercial and retail development that is socially and economically inclusive.

Planning Board Authority

Colorado Revised Statutes 31-25-107(2) requires that a jurisdiction's planning board or commission make a finding that a proposed urban redevelopment plan conforms with the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. DURA then conveys the Planning Board finding to City Council.

Analysis of the Comprehensive Plan Conformity

CPD staff finds that the proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to the Denver comprehensive plan and its applicable supplements, *Blueprint Denver*, the *Golden Triangle Plan*, and the *Downtown Area Plan*.

Comprehensive Plan 2040

CPD staff finds that the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to *Comprehensive Plan 2040* by furthering several city-wide objectives, policies and actions in the plan, including the following under the Equitable, Affordable, and Inclusive vision element:

- **Goal 1:** Ensure all Denver residents have safe, convenient, and affordable access to basic services and a variety of amenities.
 - **Strategy C:** Improve equitable access to resources that improve quality of life, including cultural and natural amenities, health care, education, parks, recreation, nutritious food and the arts (p. 28).
- **Goal 5:** Reduce the involuntary displacement of residents and businesses.
 - **Strategy B:** Stabilize residents and businesses at risk of displacement through programs and policies that help them to stay in their existing community (p. 29).
- **Goal 7:** Make neighborhoods accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
 - **Strategy B:** Prioritize infrastructure improvements that allow for residents of all abilities to access and live in any neighborhood (p. 30).
 - **Strategy C:** Design and program public spaces and recreation centers to accommodate people of all ages and abilities (p. 30).

The development contemplated by the URP would advance several strategies under the Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods vision element:

- **Goal 1:** Create a city of complete neighborhoods.
 - **Strategy B:** Ensure neighborhoods offer a mix of housing types and services for a diverse population (p. 34).
- **Goal 2:** Enhance Denver's neighborhoods through high-quality urban design.
 - **Strategy C:** Create people-oriented places that embrace community character with thoughtful transitions, aspirational design and an engaging public realm (p. 34).
 - **Strategy D:** Use urban design to contribute to economic viability, public health, safety, environmental well-being, neighborhood culture, and quality of life (p. 34).
- **Goal 3:** Preserve the authenticity of Denver's neighborhoods and celebrate our history, architecture, and culture.
 - **Strategy E:** Support the stewardship and reuse of existing buildings, including city properties (p. 34).
- **Goal 4:** Ensure every neighborhood is economically strong and dynamic.
 - **Strategy A:** Grow and support neighborhood-serving businesses (p. 35)
- **Goal 5:** Create and preserve parks and public spaces that reflect the identity of Denver's neighborhoods.
 - **Strategy B:** Design public spaces to facilitate social connections and enhance cultural identity (p. 35).

The following strategy under the Economically Diverse and Vibrant vision element would also be advanced by the URP:

- *Goal 3:* Sustain and grow Denver’s local neighborhood businesses.
 - *Strategy A:* Promote small, locally-owned businesses and restaurants that reflect the unique character of Denver (p. 46)

The following strategies of the Environmentally Resilient vision element would also be advanced by the URP:

- *Goal 7:* Improve solid waste diversion and conserve raw materials.
 - *Strategy C:* Prioritize the reuse of existing buildings and explore incentives to salvage or reuse materials from demolished structures (p. 54)

Finally, the following strategies of the Healthy and Active vision element would be advanced by the URP:

- *Goal 1:* Create and enhance environments that support physical activity and healthy living.
 - *Strategy C:* Design safe public spaces and recreational areas to serve people of all ages and backgrounds (p.58)

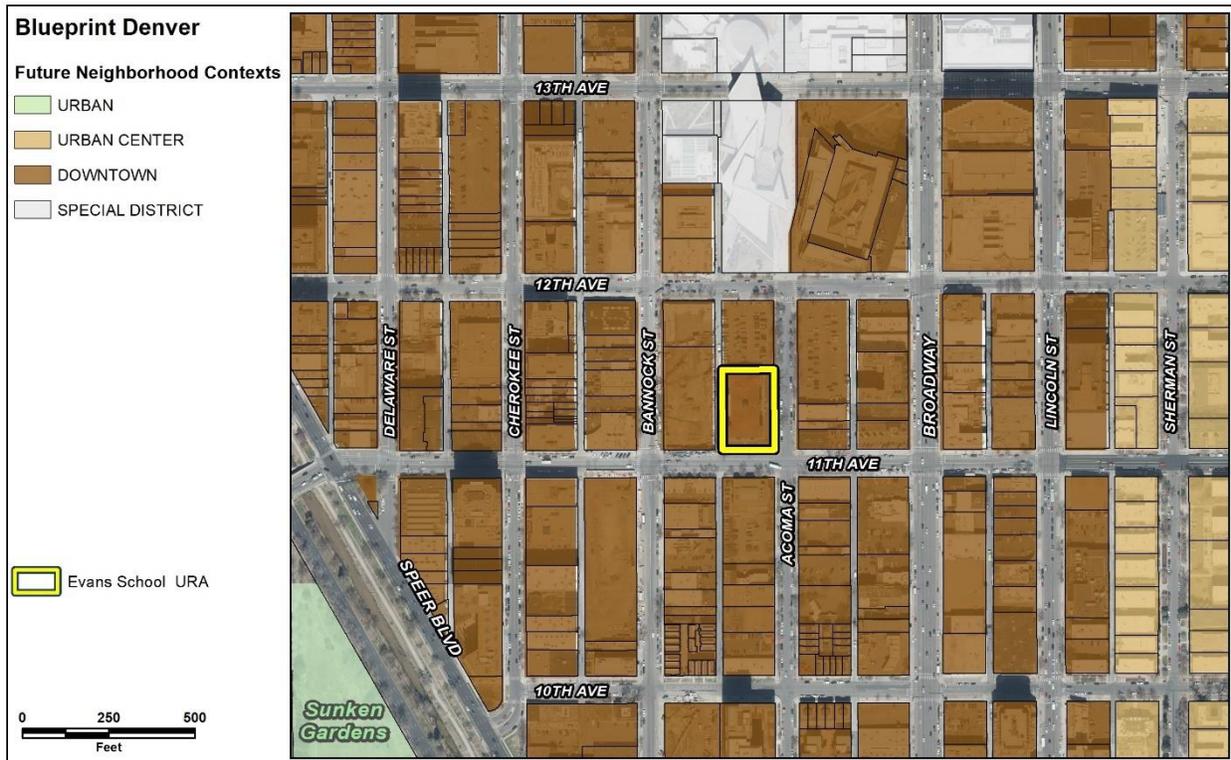
Blueprint Denver (2019)

Blueprint Denver is Denver’s citywide, 20-year land use and transportation plan. It was adopted by City Council in 2019 as a supplement to *Comprehensive Plan 2040*. The plan calls for an inclusive, equitable city through complete neighborhoods and transportation networks and a strategic growth strategy that focuses growth in key areas.

In *Blueprint Denver*, future neighborhood contexts are used to help understand differences in land use and built form and mobility options at a higher scale, between neighborhoods. *Blueprint Denver* identifies the subject property within the Downtown Neighborhood Context. The proposed Evans School URA is identified as a High Residential Place Type. The proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan will promote development that is consistent with the intent of the neighborhood contexts, future place, street types and growth area maps in the plan.

In addition, the proposed URP furthers several recommendations as described below.

Neighborhood Context



The proposed URA is within the Downtown neighborhood context. *Blueprint Denver* describes Downtown as “the densest and most active. It contains the highest intensity residential and includes the largest employment center in Denver. Development in this context should contain a high mix of uses, with good street activation” (p. 265).

Future Places

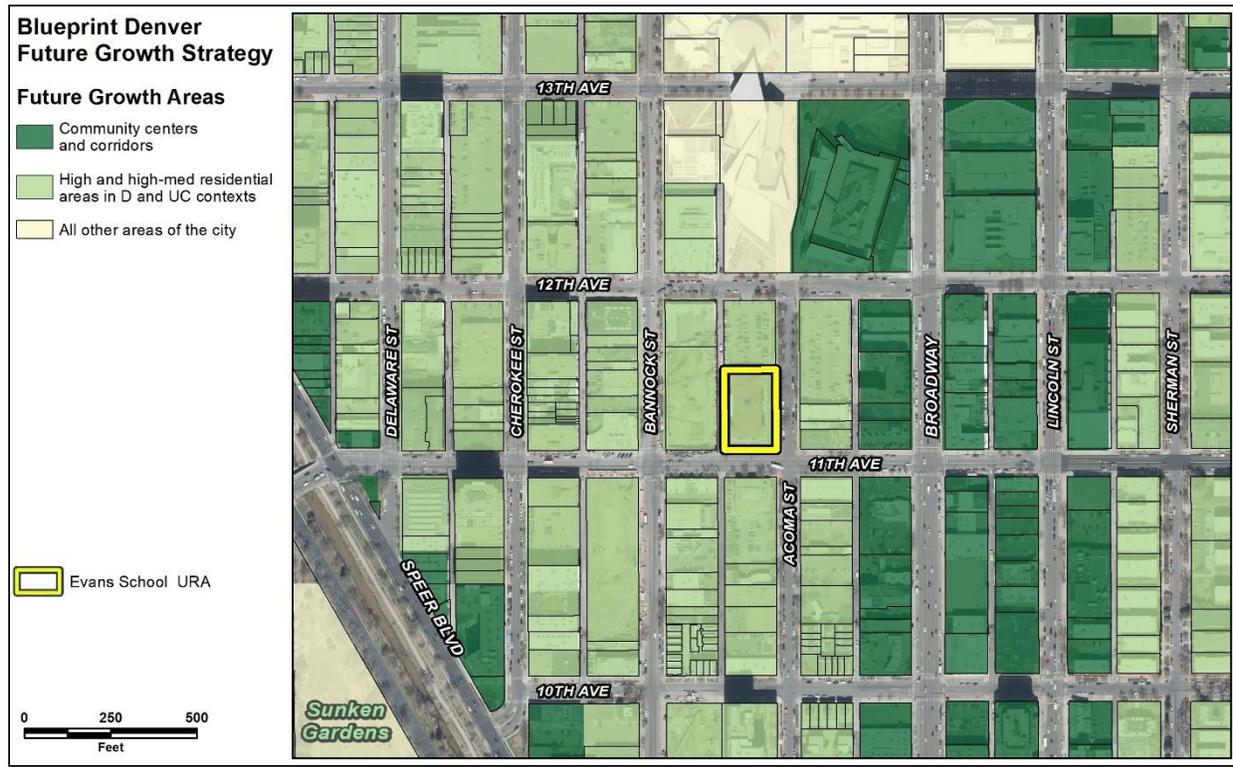


The proposed URA is designated as High Residential which is intended to include “a high mix of uses throughout, including high density multi-unit residential, commercial, civic, and institutional uses. The downtown residential areas are distinguished from the downtown regional center by their land use being slightly more multi-unit residential in nature. The downtown residential area features various scales of special use parks, flexible outdoor spaces and landscaped plazas designed to be welcoming to all ages. These spaces are connected by a consistent canopy of street trees and landscaping incorporated within green infrastructure, planters, or structural cells” (p. 274).

Future Street Type

Blueprint Denver designates Acoma Street as a local street, which are “designed for the highest degree of property access and the lowest amount of through movement” (p. 154). 11th Avenue is designated as a Downtown Collector. Collector Streets are designed to, “collect movement from local streets and convey it to arterial streets” (p. 154). Downtown streets are designed to be “surrounded by the most intense land uses including hotels, street level retail and office, residential, and mixed-use towers. Pedestrian oriented with maximum building coverage of the site” (p. 158).

Growth Strategy



Blueprint Denver designates the property as a high and high-med residential areas in D and UC contexts. Collectively throughout the City, this growth strategy areas are anticipated to see 15% of new housing growth and 5% of new employment growth by 2040 (p. 50-51). The proposed URP will promote the development of jobs within the proposed URA, consistent with the *Blueprint Denver* growth strategy.

Other recommendations furthered by the proposed URP

Blueprint Denver provides policy recommendations and strategies to create complete neighborhoods and networks, guide future growth, and promote equitable development. The proposed URP will further many of these recommendations, including the following (with reference to *Blueprint Denver*):

- *Land Use & Built Form: General, Policy 2:* Incentivize or require efficient development of land, especially in transit-rich areas.
 - *Strategy E:* In historic areas, balance efficiency with preservation through strategies that encourage the reuse of structures (p. 72)
- *Land Use & Built Form: Economics, Policy 2:* Improve equitable access to employment area throughout the city to ensure all residents can connect to employment opportunities.
 - *Strategy C:* Encourage entrepreneurship and provide opportunities for new locally-owned businesses, especially businesses owned by women and people of color, to locate in regional centers (p. 90)
- *Land Use & Built Form: Economics, Policy 4:* Promote creative industries, maker spaces, artists, and small businesses as vital components to Denver’s innovation economy.

- *Strategy C*: Develop programs and identify potential incentives to maintain existing spaces, reduce rent costs and other business costs and help create new spaces for hand crafted manufacturing, maker spaces, artists and other small, locally-owned businesses, especially in areas that score high for Vulnerability to Displacement (p. 92).
- *Land Use & Built Form: Design Quality & Preservation, Policy 2*: Ensure residential neighborhoods retain their unique character as infill development occurs.
 - *Strategy A*: Continue the city's commitment to existing historic districts and landmarks and use historic designation to preserve the character of an individual structure or district of where there is historic, architectural, cultural, and/or geographic significance (p. 99)
- *Quality-of-Life Infrastructure, Policy 10*: Work with public and private partners to improve access to shops, restaurants, entertainment, civic uses, services, and a variety of daily needs for all Denver residents.
 - *Strategy C*: Promote development that compatibly integrates and includes daily needs such as childcare centers, grocery stores, and community serving retail (p. 125)

Golden Triangle Neighborhood Plan (2014)

The Urban Redevelopment Area is located in the Civic Center neighborhood, the focus area of the *Golden Triangle Neighborhood Plan*. The plan was adopted in 2014 to outline a vision, goals, plan framework, and implementation strategies for evolution and change. The plan outlines four vision elements – Eclectic, Connected, Creative, and Livable - all of which would be furthered by the URP.

Recommendations furthered by the proposed URP

- *A.1.d*: Allow for and promote a range of arts-related land uses, to preserve the distinctive artistic character and cultivate a new “creative class” of artists to enrich the neighborhood (p. 36)
- *A.2.c*: Encourage the reuse of existing buildings to preserve the neighborhoods varied design context while providing affordable opportunities for startup businesses (p. 38)
- *A.2.d*: Promote preservation of the Golden Triangle’s diverse historic resources to maintain neighborhood identity (p. 38)
- *A.3.c*: Ensure that any public financing tools or organizational entities are available and ready to be implemented in order to facilitate projects (p. 42)
- *C.1.a*: Leverage existing neighborhood assets, such as Galvanize, galleries, museums, and creative employers, to attract additional businesses (p. 70)
- *C.1.c*: Integrate arts and technology into public spaces and amenities (p. 70)
- *C.2.f*: Encourage the creative reuse of the Evans School as a space for arts and culture programming (p. 71)
- *D.1.a*: Identify a location, design program, and funding sources, including partnerships with the private sector, to create a neighborhood gathering space(s) in the heart of the Golden Triangle (p. 80)
- *D.1.b*: Foster the development of small, intimate spaces throughout the Golden Triangle that are privately owned and/or maintained (p. 82)
- *D.2.c*: Capitalize on the opportunity to link and activate the street’s mix of residential, retail, dining, small offices, neighborhood-oriented goods and services and arts and culture facilities (p. 87)

Downtown Area Plan (2007)

The *Downtown Area Plan* contains distinct strategies for the eight districts identified as making up the downtown area boundary. Key recommendations for the Golden Triangle include:

- “Activate the restored Evans School and develop compatible infill on the remainder of the site to facilitate appropriate development along Acoma Avenue of the Arts” and “encourage growth of existing arts-oriented retail uses” (p. 47)

CPD Staff Recommendation

Based on the analysis presented in this staff report, CPD staff recommends that the Planning Board find the proposed Evans School Urban Redevelopment Plan to be in conformance with the Denver Comprehensive Plan and its applicable supplements.

Attachments

1. DURA Planning Board memo
2. Proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan