

Considering Equity and Climate as a Part of the Adopted Plan Consistency Criterion

What We Heard

Issue Statement

Throughout 2024, we have heard from key stakeholders that rezonings should be reviewed for their impacts on equity and climate, not just for their consistency with land use maps. In September 2022, when the project team summarized issues identified by city staff, the Advancing Equity in Rezoning task force, focus group members, and the public, one of the major themes identified was that: **The review criteria do not clearly consider equity impacts.**

Proposal

The city's adopted plans can be used to review a rezoning with an equity and environmental sustainability lens. Additional review criteria are not needed. Two items will help decision makers review the equity and climate impacts of a rezoning:

- Staff reports and presentations provided to City Council and Planning Board will contain an expanded review of plan guidance pertaining to equity and environmental sustainability.
- Staff will create short summaries of plan guidance related to equity and environmental sustainability that could be applicable to rezonings.

Plan Guidance

Denver's citywide adopted plans, *Blueprint Denver* and *Comprehensive Plan 2040*, holistically incorporate equity and environmental sustainability throughout their vision elements, goals, and policies. These concepts are embedded in the city's growth strategy and implemented by the future places map. The example below demonstrates how a rezoning can improve equitable outcomes and sustainability simply by following the land use vision outlined in *Blueprint Denver*. However, in some cases, a rezoning may meet the land use vision but may not include tools necessary to fully implement broader equity or environmental sustainability goals and policies.

Climate in Adopted Plans

Comprehensive Plan 2040

Comprehensive Plan 2040 contains the vision element "Environmentally Resilient", which describes a future Denver that is a thriving, sustainable city connected to nature and resilient to climate change. The plan includes goals related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, preparing for climate change, improving air quality, and expanding green infrastructure.

Blueprint Denver:

Blueprint Denver states that reversing the city's contribution to climate change is critical and that how we plan the city can help reduce Denver's drain on resources and reduce its carbon footprint. This commitment should act as an over-arching guide.

Further, the compact development pattern described in *Blueprint Denver* focuses on strategic infill locations linked with strong transportation options, where housing needs are met with a wide range of

options. This growth strategy will reduce water use, improve public health indicators such as air quality, and preserve more open space— making Denver better prepared to face the effects of climate change.

The example below demonstrates how a rezoning can improve equitable outcomes and sustainability simply by following the land use vision outlined in Blueprint Denver.

Equity in Adopted Plans

Comprehensive Plan 2040

Comprehensive Plan 2040 contains the vision element “Equitable, Affordable, Inclusive”, which outlines Denver’s goal to become an inclusive community with a high quality of life for all residents, regardless of income level, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age. The plan includes goals relating to affordable housing, involuntary displacement, and access to services.

Blueprint Denver: Equity Concepts

Blueprint Denver provides three major concepts to consider for future policies and implementation decisions: Access to Opportunity; Vulnerability to Involuntary Displacement; and Housing and Jobs Diversity. While most single rezonings cannot significantly advance equity for every concept, decision makers can use these measurements to understand the current conditions in the area where the rezoning is proposed and consider how a proposed rezoning might contribute to equity trends in a neighborhood or across the city.

Rezoning is One Tool in the Toolbox

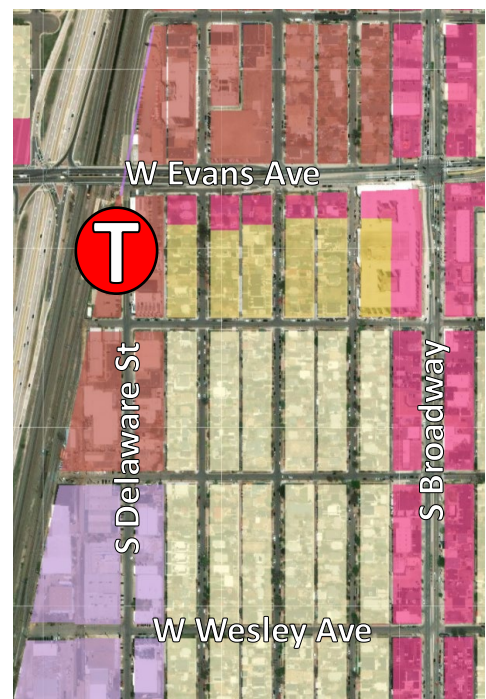
Rezoning changes allowed land uses, and the city can also use other tools to advance its climate and equity objectives.

- Denver Energy Code, Denver Building Code, Energize Denver, and the Green Building Ordinance work together for improving energy efficiency and reducing the climate impact of buildings.

Example:

The image on the right shows the area surrounding the Evans Light Rail station and the South Broadway corridor. The area includes plan guidance that supports an increase in residential and mixed-use density (pink and red colors) in certain locations surrounding these amenities.

- This guidance supports the city’s goals to improve equity and reduce climate impacts by enabling additional density near transit and the Broadway corridor. Climate goals will be advanced as new dwelling units in these areas tend to be less auto-dependent and will benefit from energy-efficient multi-unit buildings.
- Equity goals are advanced as this guidance enables a greater number of new affordable and market-rate units at this location with access to amenities and transit.



DRAFT EXAMPLES

How to Apply the Equity Concepts to Rezoning

Denver City Council, Planning Board, and community can use the themes and questions below in evaluating a rezoning's consistency with the Comprehensive Plan 2040 and Blueprint Denver through an equity lens.

Equity Concepts

- What key equity concepts and policies will potentially be advanced by approval of the rezoning?
- What key equity concepts and policies will potentially **not** be advanced by approval of the rezoning?

Improving Access to Opportunity

- Is the proposed rezoning located in an area with less access to opportunity, or more access to opportunity?
- Would the rezoning enable the development of amenities that could improve access to opportunity measurements?
- Does the rezoning increase the range of housing options and affordability near existing amenities?

Reducing Vulnerability to Involuntary Displacement

- Could the rezoning result in direct displacement of existing residents?
- What indirect displacement might occur because of this rezoning?
- Does the rezoning increase the range of housing options and affordability near existing amenities?

Expanding Housing and Jobs Diversity

- How does the rezoning affect housing diversity in the area?
- Would the rezoning result in additional affordable housing options in a neighborhood with good access to amenities?