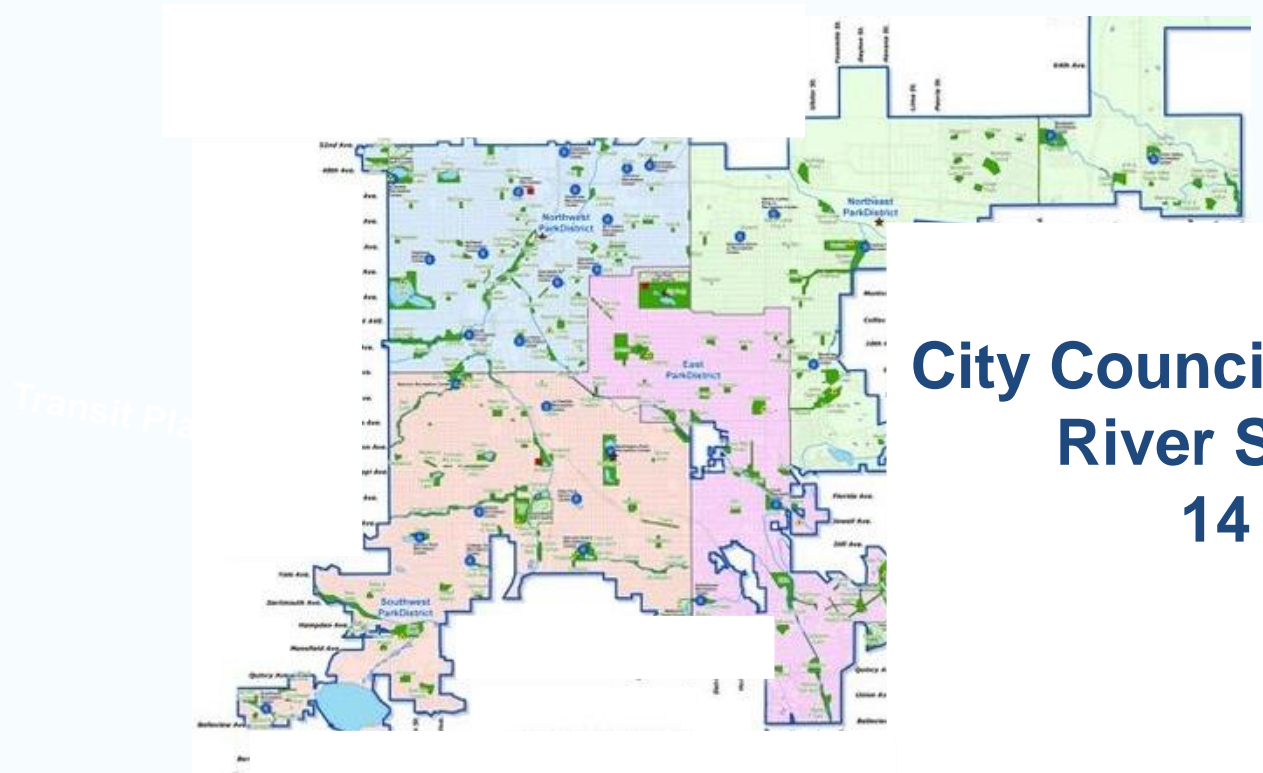


Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit



**City Council South Platte
River Subcommittee
14 January 2026**

**Presenters:
Rocky Piro, Ph.D., FAICP
Frank Rowe, Denver Park Trust
John Desmond, Denver Park Trust**

Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit



Today's Topics

1. **Citywide Open Space Deficits – overview**
2. **River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities**
3. **Partnering Opportunities with River Sisters and CU Denver College of Architecture & Planning**
4. **Concluding Thoughts**

citywide gaps
river corridor
partnerships
conclusion

Citywide Parkland & Open Space Deficits

brief overview

Game Plan for a
Healthy City



Denver
DENVER
PLANNING & REDEVELOPMENT

citywide gaps
river corridor
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conclusion

at issue:

- ❖ *Game Plan for a Healthy City* – identifies current gap *at least* at 1300 acres
- ❖ Projected to become 3800 acre gap (+ or -) in subsequent decade
- ❖ National average among all US cities – 13 acres/1000 people
- ❖ Denver's average has dropped to 9 acres/ 1000 people

cities at or above national average:

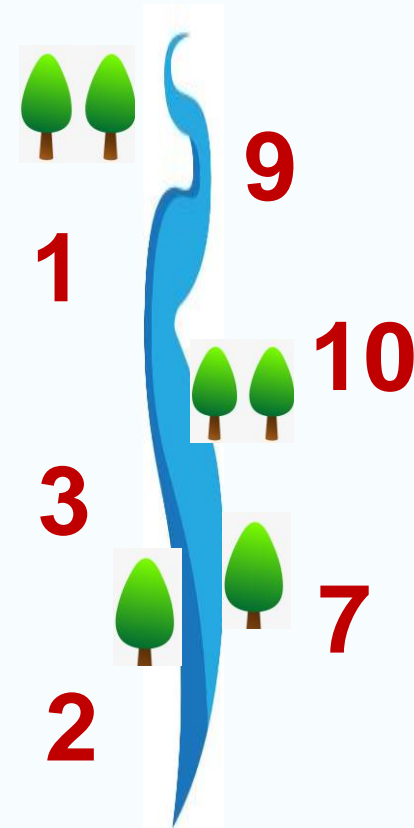
Austin, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York, Phoenix, Portland, Raleigh, San Diego, Seattle, & Washington DC

Citywide Parkland & Open Space Deficits

national average = 13 acres/1000 people

District-by-district analysis | acres per 1000 people

- ❖ *District 1* – 9.7
- ❖ *District 2* – 3.3
- ❖ *District 3* – 4.4
- ❖ *District 4* – 12.7
- ❖ *District 5* – 7.8
- ❖ *District 6* – 5.7
- ❖ *District 7* – 7
- ❖ *District 8* - 18
- ❖ *District 9* – 9.5
- ❖ *District 10* – 2.5
- ❖ *District 11* – 7.7



DISTRICTS ALONG RIVER

Citywide Parkland Deficit

example: District 1

existing & potential sites

District 1 Parkland Estimates (preliminary estimates)

tentative - subject to review & revision

District-wide population = 66,000
District-wide park total = **638** acres

park/population ratio district-wide = 9.7 acres/per 1000 people

X District 1 below national average of 13 acres/1000 population (source: Trust for Public Lands)

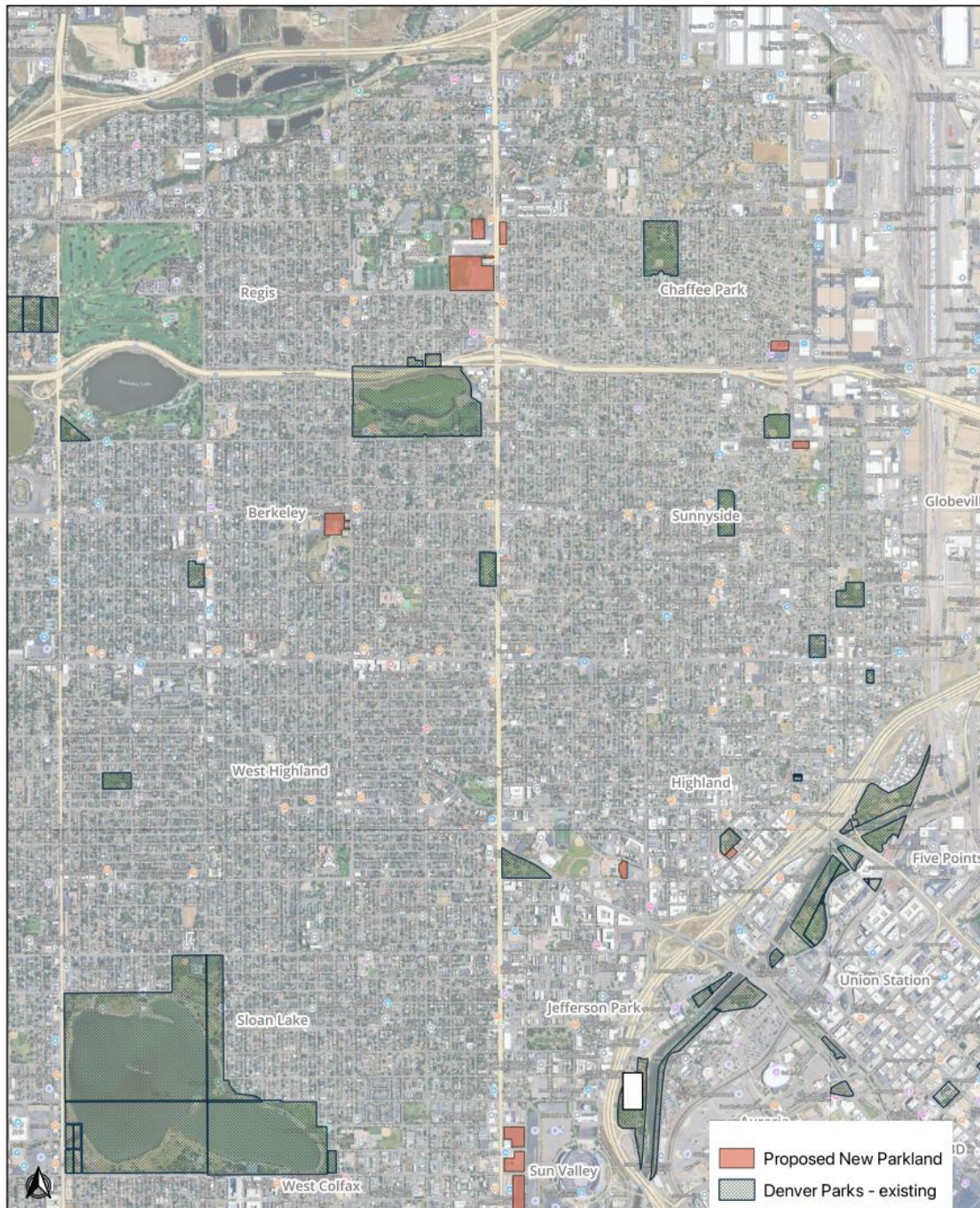
aspirational total park acres for District 1 = 860 acres

>> District 1 needs **222** additional acres to reach the national average

PARK	ACRES	DESIGNATED?
Berkeley Lake Park	81.2	
Bernabe "Indio" Franco Park	0.6	
Cesar Chavez Park	2.5	
Chaffee Park	5.0	partial
Ciancio Park	4.0	partial
Community Plaza	1.0	partial
Confluence Park (part)	2.8	no
Diamond Hill	2.1	no
Fishback Park	2.2	
Gates Crescent Park	10.8	
Hallack Park	n/a	
Highland Gateway Park	0.9	no
Highland Park	7.0	
Hirshorn Park	2.2	
Inspiration Point Park	25.5	
Jefferson Park	6.6	
Jefferson Park Place	n/a	
La Raza Park	2.3	
McDonough Park	3.7	
Pferdesteller Park	3.0	
Rocky Mountain Lake Park	55.6	
Sloans Lake Park	284.2	
St. Patrick's Park	0.3	partial
Viking Park	2.8	
Willis Case Golf Course	119	
46 th & Pecos Park	n/a	
51 st & Zuni Park	12.8	
	638.1	

Citywide Parkland Deficit example: District 1 existing & potential sites

Proposed Parkland - District 1



River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities

brief overview



at issue:

- ❖ **E. coli contamination in Denver's South Platte River at levels up to 137 times higher than federal safety limit, according Colorado health officials.¹**
- ❖ **Embankments & vegetation necessary for a healthy waterway continue to be compromised.**
- ❖ **Adjacent land uses & infrastructure facilities regularly conflict with maintaining a healthy functioning river.**
- ❖ **Significant vacant, partially vacant, & underutilized lands within the corridor.**
- ❖ **Address new restrictions on gas stations & existing industrial areas.**

citywide gaps
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Finley, Bruce (4 March 2021). *Fecal matter elevated in South Platte River*

River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities

Identifying river corridor district

Proposed South Platte River 1/2 Mile Easement



River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities

brief overview

opportunities:

- ❖ Create river-supportive land use, zoning, & regulations.
- ❖ Buildable Lands Analysis (required by SB24-174) can provides information on existing land uses & new opportunities – including opportunities for new parklands & open spaces.¹
- ❖ Establish comprehensive “South Platte River District” with a 21st century vision for the entire corridor.
- ❖ Consider district-wide rezoning, action plan for new parklands, and/or an overlay district with river-supportive standards for development & infrastructure.

River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities options for consideration

- ❖ District-wide vision, plan, & zoning
- ❖ Overlay zoning
- ❖ Waterway-based zoning & standards (including low-impact development standards)
- ❖ Performance zoning



City of Albuquerque's Urban Bosque



Littleton, Colorado

Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit



3 Factors for Achieving Adequate Parkland & Open Space

- 1) Amount | i.e., acres per population
- 2) Accessibility | i.e., 10-minute walk & roll
- 3) Quality | i.e., condition & upkeep

Possible demonstration project . . .

. . . e.g., Riverfront Park in Sun Valley

Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit

River Sisters Congreso

The “Turquoise Necklace”

- Elevate historic & cultural contributions made by Indigenous & Latino people to the South Platte River.
- Transform the river to unite communities along river.
- Advocate for its protection & recognition as a living entity.
- Advocacy for “River Personhood.”
- Promote community engagement & cultural preservation – to advance awareness, education, water policy, & organizing community events.



Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit

Concluding Thoughts



citywide gaps
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- ❖ What type of “district” for South Platte River & adjacent areas?
- ❖ South Platte River Corridor – identifying locations for additional parkland & open space
- ❖ Citywide opportunities – apply *buildable lands analysis* – required SB24-174 strategic growth element to identify vacant & underutilized sites
- ❖ Partnering Opportunities – Denver Parks Trust, River Sisters Circle, CU Denver College of Architecture & Planning

River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities

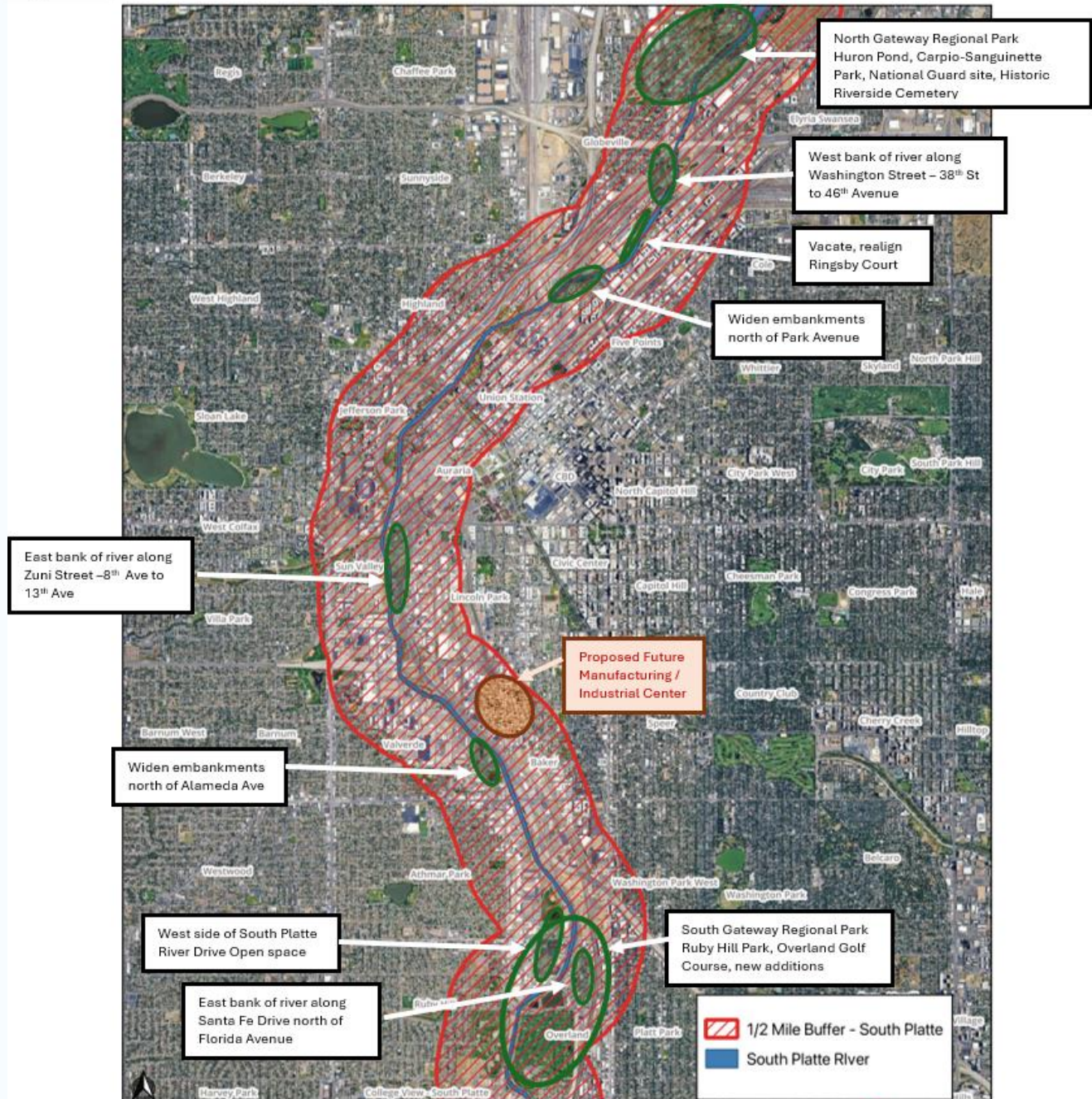
factors for consideration

- ❖ Identify potential sites to solve City's open space deficit.
- ❖ Adopt *sustainable* land use practices, including best practices for urban waterways, as well as landscaping & revegetation regulations.
- ❖ Establish environmental & energy-efficient building standards
- ❖ Employ *low impact development* standards for infrastructure & services – such as impervious pavement
- ❖ Apply *adequate facilities analysis* for needed facilities & services – including mobility, storm & waste water, public safety
- ❖ Conduct community impact analysis for social justice, health, & climate – ensure authentic community engagement

River Corridor Challenges & Opportunities

Identifying river corridor district

Proposed South Platte Park & Open Space Additions



Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit

inventory potential sites for parkland

- ❖ **vacant, partially vacant, & underutilized lands**
 - ❖ buildable lands evaluation
 - ❖ inventory efforts in the community – genuine public engagement opportunities
 - ❖ partner with Denver Park Trust & CU Denver CAP
- ❖ **revisit open space set-asides for new development projects**



Citywide Parkland & Open Space Deficits

national average = 13 acres/1000 people

Denver's average = 9 acres/1000 people

at issue:

Large Scale Development Projects
(*Site Development Plan*)

background:

current provision – 10% set-aside for open space

problem:

calculation based on site geometry, rather than
population & density

solution:

calculate open space by “people per acre” in project
area (i.e., better to base on density rather than
euchlidian geometry)

e.g.: 13-15 acres for every 1000 people



Denver's Park & Open Space Deficit



Thank you!

Rocky Piro, Ph.D., FAICP – docroc93@gmail.com
Frank Rowe, Denver Park Trust - frankrowe@denverparktrust.org