

FAQ – The Need for Parks and Open Space Charter Amendment

1. Why do we need to preserve Denver’s large urban open space?

- Now more than ever, we need large tracts of open space. Park demand has mushroomed during the recent pandemic, and we have learned that walking matters. Walking has physical and psychological benefits – it strengthens our legs, heart and lungs, prevents depression, increases the strength of brain signals, and boosts creativity.
- But you can’t take a walk in a pocket park. Access to large public open spaces with shade, walking paths, room for kids to play, water features and birdlife encourages higher levels of walking. A visit to a large park is restorative, providing an opportunity to lose oneself in nature, away from our usual setting.
- With significantly increased density and population (200,000 more people since 1998), Denver’s parks and open space are falling behind. For example:
 - Since 2012 Denver has fallen from 13th to 29th in the Trust for Public Lands park score for largest cities
 - Only 8% of Denver land is used for parks and open space and the national median for large cities is 15%
 - Denver has 8.9 acres of park space per 1,000 residents and the national average is 13.1 acres per 1,000
- Denver’s Climate Adaptation Plan confirms what we can all feel – the heat island effect is making our city hotter as more concrete is poured. As to the PHGC Land, the surrounding neighborhoods – Northeast Park Hill, Clayton, Cole, Elyria/Swansea and Globeville – are among the most vulnerable in the city to the heat island effect, according to the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment. These neighborhoods also have high percentages of areas not under a tree canopy. For example, nearly 85 percent of the west part of Northeast Park Hill is not under a tree canopy.
- The Denver Department of Parks and Recreation recognizes that the northern (and western) neighborhoods of Denver have more ethnic and racial diversity, lack of car access, lowest incomes, and highest levels of obesity and chronic disease. They also have among the highest park and recreation facility demand in the city.

2. Why is it a waste of taxpayer dollars to start a small area planning process for the PHGC Land?

- Starting the small area plan is putting the cart before the horse.
- Over two decades ago the City of Denver used taxpayer dollars to purchase a perpetual open space conservation easement protecting the PHGC Land from development.
- The voters of Denver approved the 1989 bond issue that funded the purchase.
- A City commitment to the people is a City commitment, and just because the office of mayor changes hands, the word of the City must not.
- Land speculator and real estate developer Westside Investment Partners purchased the PHGC Land knowing there was a conservation easement attached. It purchased the land at a steal, betting that it could use political connections to terminate the perpetual conservation easement and cut a deal with the city to build housing and retail on it, ignoring nearby available properties that would not displace residents or sacrifice open space.
- Now this politically-connected wealthy investment group with money to pay a small army of lobbyists and new “partners” is furiously making promises of 3rd party deals to salvage their ill-considered gamble and trying to

turn a community against itself with blatant “divide and conquer” tactics.

3. If Westside Investment Partners would use a metropolitan district to build infrastructure of a PHGC Land development as it will in Loretto Heights, will housing be affordable?

- Denver's property tax mill rate is approximately 72. Westside's metro tax district for Loretto Heights service plan expects to add 90 mills, for a total of 162 mills, more than doubling the tax burden.
- Example: a family of four with two working parents making a total of \$6,000 per month can qualify for a mortgage on a \$300,000 home.
 - at a cost of \$300/square foot, that family could afford a 1,000 square foot home (\$300,000 purchase price, 3% down payment, \$290,000 mortgage).
 - in Denver, the annual tax bill would be \$1,547 (\$129/month)
 - for the same house in a metro district (*e.g.*, Loretto Heights), the tax bill would be \$3,477 (\$290/month)
 - due to the higher taxes in a metro district the amount of the mortgage the family could qualify for is capped at just \$260,000 (a 10% loss of buying power)

4. Whose voices have been heard regarding the future of the PHGC Land?

- First and foremost, the voices of Denver taxpayers were heard in 1989 when voters approved the bond issue that provided the \$2 million used by the City in 1997 to purchase the perpetual open space conservation easement. “Perpetual” means “perpetual.”
- Despite having sold its development rights in 1997 for \$2 million, Clayton Early Learning later had seller’s remorse and decided after 20 years that it wanted more money from the PHGC Land. Clayton hired high-powered consultants CRL and Stantec to conduct what it called a “Visioning” process to analyze other uses for the PHGC land that could generate more money for Clayton if the conservation easement could be broken.
- As part of the CRL/Stantec-led Clayton Visioning process, the consultants in 2017 performed a non-scientific web-based and in-person survey of 741 residents. Over half of the respondents wanted it to become a park or open space. The next highest response was for recreational activities. And yet the conclusion of the study minimized that result and proceeded to offer 4 development scenarios of various densities, few if any of which envisioned families. Rather the housing options assumed fewer than two occupants per unit, with only the highest population option assuming 2.5 occupants per unit.
- In 2019 a truly scientific community survey was conducted. Overall, 77% expressed the desire to preserve the conservation easement so that the property would remain open space, recreation and/or golf. Drilling deeper into the responses, only 3% supported Westside's 50 to 75% development of the property.

5. What are the “conservation purposes” and permitted land uses in the PHGC Land conservation easement?

- The overarching “conservation purposes” of the PHGC Land conservation easement are to conserve the land as open space, to maintain the land’s scenic and open condition, and to preserve the land for recreational use.
- Permitted land uses include a golf course, ball fields, tennis courts, and other recreational uses consistent with the “conservation purposes.”