

Considering Equity in a Rezoning Application

INTRODUCTION

The city's adopted plans can be used to review a rezoning with an equity lens. This document summarizes plan guidance, provides an example of how it relates to rezonings, and ends with a list of questions that could be asked during the rezoning process.

How Equity is Considered in a Rezoning

When staff, Planning Board, and the City Council review a rezoning application, they use review criteria stated in the Denver Zoning Code. The first review criterion is whether the rezoning application is consistent with Denver's adopted plans. These long-range plans set the future vision for the city and have many recommendations related to equity in development.

Equity Defined

Comprehensive Plan 2040, Denver's adopted citywide long range plan, defines equity as "when everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has the opportunity to thrive. Where there is equity, a person's identity does not determine their outcome. As a city, we advance equity by serving individuals, families and communities in a manner that reduces or eliminates persistent institutional biases and barriers based on race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation, age, and other factors."

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.

Vision Element - Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive: Denver is an equitable, inclusive community with a high quality of life for all residents, regardless of income level, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or age. (p. 29)

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 1: Ensure all Denver residents have safe, convenient, and affordable access to basic services and a variety of amenities.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 2: Build housing as a continuum to serve residents across a range of incomes, ages and needs.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 3: Develop housing that is affordable to residents of all income levels.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 4: Preserve existing affordable housing.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 5: Reduce the involuntary displacement of residents and businesses.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 6: Integrate equity considerations into city policies, processes and plans.

Equitable, Affordable And Inclusive - Goal 8: Increase housing options for Denver's most vulnerable populations.

Blueprint Denver

Blueprint Denver, Denver's long range land use and transportation plan under *Comprehensive Plan 2040*, 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, larger-scale rezonings could make an impact. 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.

Equity Concepts

Access to Opportunity

This concept recognizes that not all neighborhoods offer their residents the same access to basic services, quality education, transportation options, healthcare services, healthy food, parks and more. Areas with low access to opportunity lack many of these key components of a complete neighborhood and often exhibit lower quality-of-life outcomes—including life expectancy, educational attainment and income level—compared to the city as a whole.

Unfortunately, many areas with low access to opportunity are also areas where the majority of residents are people of color. This pattern illustrates the need to improve equity across neighborhoods and to remove barriers to opportunity that negatively impact many communities of color. In areas with high access to opportunity, it is important to increase the range of affordable housing options so that residents of all income levels can live in these neighborhoods.

Vulnerability to Involuntary Displacement

Involuntary displacement means Denver neighborhoods, and often the city as a whole, lose long-term residents and businesses. As families and local shops and restaurants leave neighborhoods where they've been for years, it often decreases the diversity of the population and employment opportunities, reduces local school enrollment, weakens the longstanding social networks in the area and pulls at the threads of the rich culture that helps to make Denver neighborhoods unique and authentic.

Effectively addressing involuntary displacement requires a variety of strategies that cut across many disciplines, plans and partners. The recommendations in Blueprint Denver supplement many other city plans, studies and programs to address this topic. You can find more in:

- Comprehensive Plan 2040
- Department of Housing Stability Five Year Strategic Plan
- Gentrification Study: Mitigating Involuntary Displacement, a study by the Office of Economic Development on gentrification and involuntary displacement (2016)

Housing and Jobs Diversity

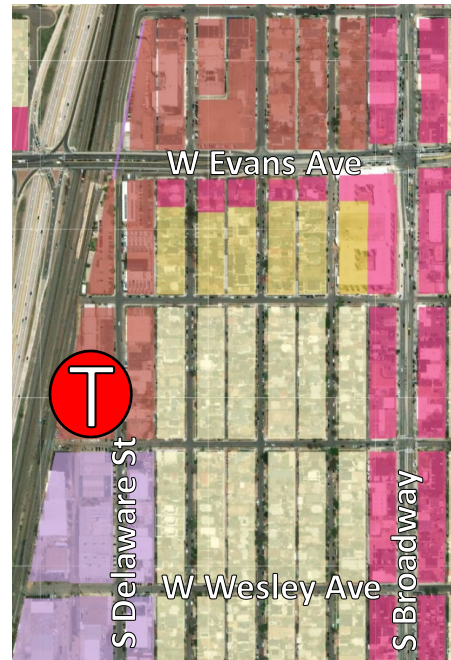
The vision of an inclusive Denver relies on a diverse range of residents, businesses, and employees. Areas that become too homogeneous and exclusive threaten that vision by reducing or eliminating choice for anyone but the most affluent and privileged. A lack of housing options at various sizes and prices often means certain populations—including families, the elderly and people with disabilities—are not able to live in neighborhoods of their choice. Increasing the range of housing and job options will also advance the important goal to maintain and increase racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in Denver's neighborhoods. Certain housing types, such as attainable homeownership, can help build wealth and improve economic mobility for Denver residents.

Example:

The image on the right shows the area between the Evans light rail station and South Broadway. The adopted plans recommend an increase in residential and mixed-use density (pink and red colors) in certain locations surrounding these amenities.

The Overland neighborhood scores a 2 out of 3 in Vulnerability to Displacement with a high percentage of renters that have lower than average median incomes and has a low Housing Diversity score.

- Equity goals are advanced by a rezoning that enables a greater number of new affordable and market-rate units because it would increase the range of housing choices near amenities, and provide access to transit to take people to jobs, entertainment, school, and other destinations.



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 *Comprehensive Plan 2040* and *Blueprint Denver* through an equity lens. The staff report that is completed for a rezoning includes a review of the proposal's consistency with this plan guidance, and rezonings of an acre or more include a more detailed, standalone equity analysis.

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 (larger scale rezonings)

- 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?

Reducing Vulnerability to Involuntary Displacement (larger scale rezonings)

- 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 (larger scale rezonings)

- 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?
- Could the rezoning enable the creation of new employment opportunities for local residents?