



TO: Denver Planning Board
FROM: Matthew Bossler, Senior City Planner – Urban Design
DATE: May 28, 2025
RE: Official Zoning Map Amendment Application #2024I-00172

Staff Report and Recommendation

Based on the criteria for review in the Denver Zoning Code, Staff recommends **approval for Application #2024I-00172.**

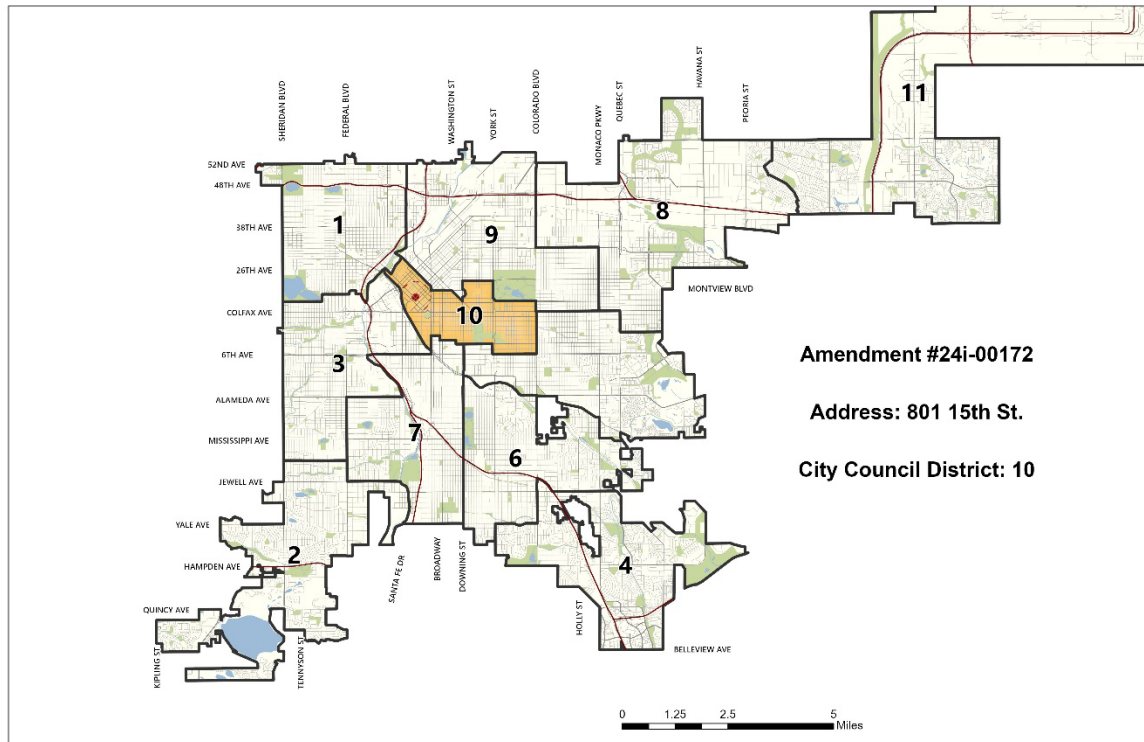
Request for Rezoning

Address:	801 15 th Street
Neighborhood/Council District:	Central Business District Council District 10 – Chris Hinds
RNOs:	Downtown Denver Business Improvement District, Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation (INC), Upper Downtown Neighborhood Association
Area of Property:	18,450 sf or 0.27 acres
Current Zoning:	D-C, UO-1
Proposed Zoning:	D-TD, UO-1
Property Owner(s):	Stout BL, LLC / William Martinic
Owner Representative:	Matthew Nilsen

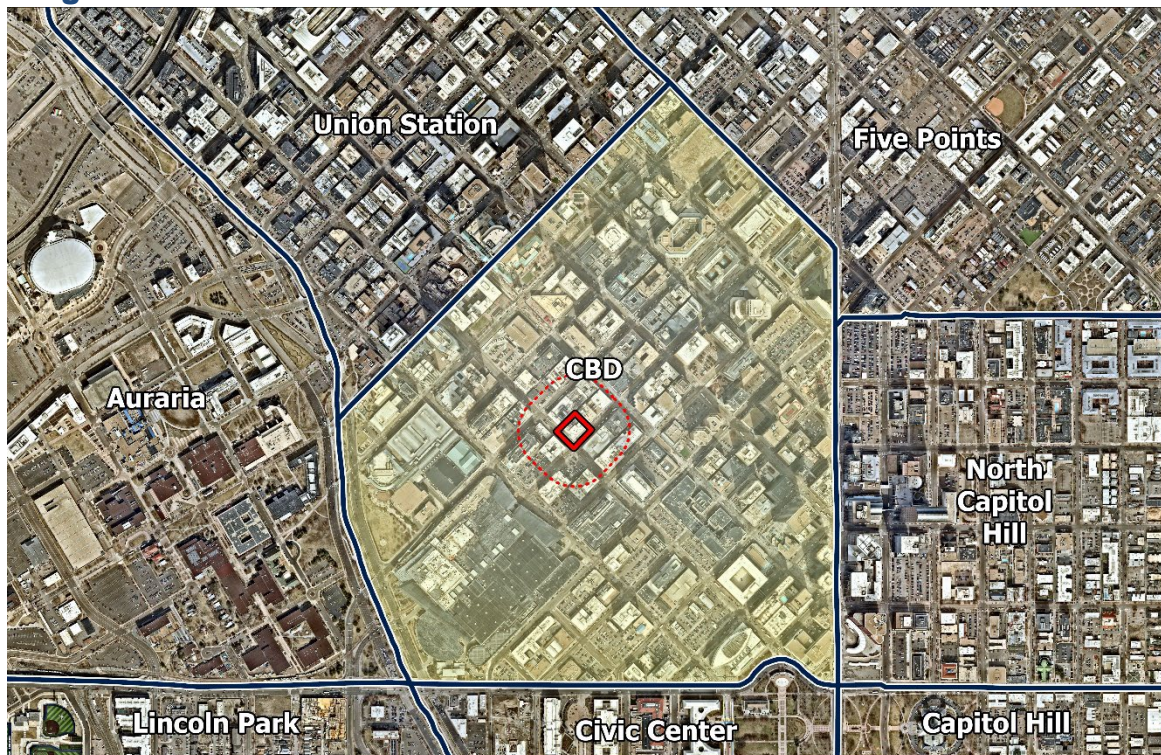
Summary of Rezoning Request

- The subject site is currently a hotel. The property owner is proposing to rezone the property to allow for large format sign installations that are permitted in the Denver Theatre District.
- The proposed D-TD, UO-1, **D**owntown, **T**heatre-**D**istrict zone district, with **U**se **O**verlay **1** (Adult Use Overlay) is intended for use in the Downtown Neighborhood Context, which is primarily characterized by mix of multi-unit residential, commercial, office, civic, institutional, and entertainment uses in large buildings containing one or more uses. Regulations on the height and form of buildings is identical to the current district. The D-TD zone district allows for large format sign installations, according to the Denver Theatre District Comprehensive Sign Plan. Flexibility in signage includes the size, type and location of signs, in exchange for a higher standard of design quality and mitigation of adverse impacts. Billboards, illuminated signs, and flashing signs are allowed. Further details of the requested zone district can be found in the proposed zone district section of the staff report (below) and in Article 8 of the Denver Zoning Code (DZC).

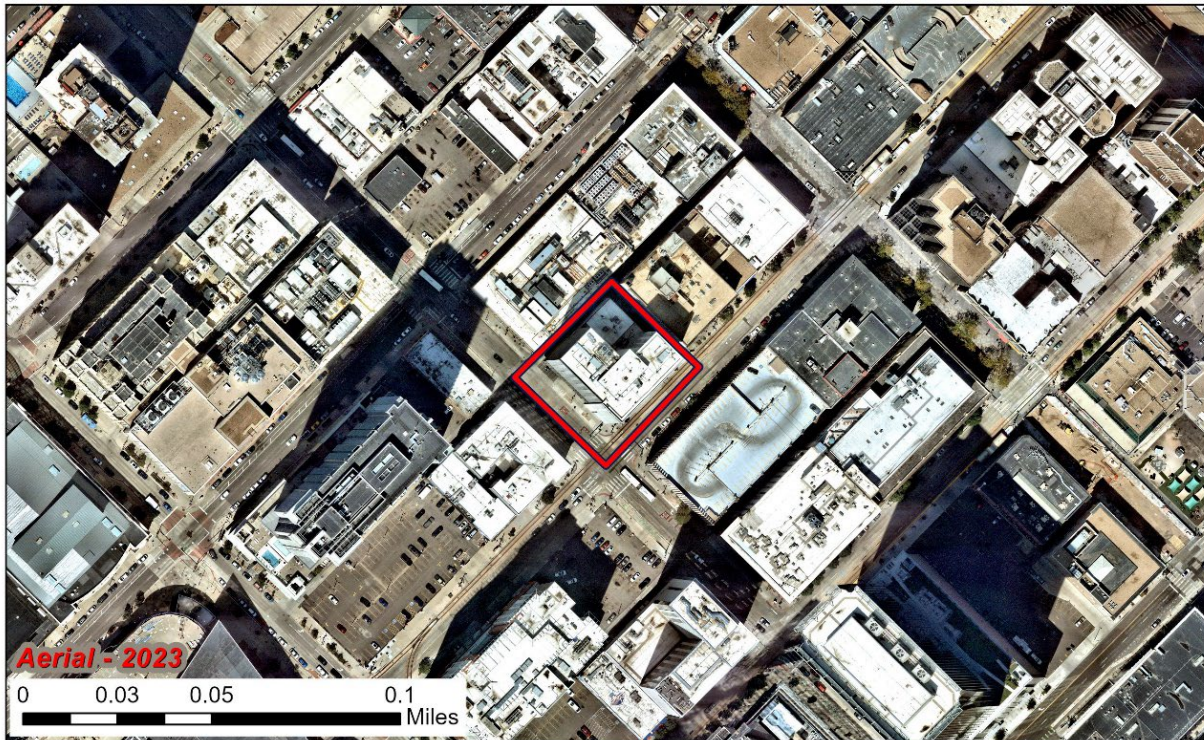
City Location



Neighborhood Location – Central Business District



1. Existing Context



The subject property is located in the middle of the Central Business District. This parcel, composed of 801 15th Street and 1525 Stout Street, is located on the northern corner of 15th Street and Stout Street.

This is one of the most transit-rich locations in the city. RTD Light Rail line D, L, and H pass by the subject property along Stout St in a NE to SW alignment (one way), and also along California Street in a SW to NE alignment (one way), with the two tracks acting as a couplet. RTD Bus Routes 0, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 15L, 19, 28, 32, 38, 44, 48, 52 runs along 15th St in a SE to NW alignment (one way). These provide connections to transit hubs Union Station and Civic Center Station, and in many directions to other parts of the city.

The property is less than a 1/8 mile walk from the 16th and Stout Light Rail Transit station, roughly ¼ mile walk from the 16th and California station, and a little over a ¼ mile walk from the Theatre District light rail station. Two bus stops for the NW-running direction of the afore-mentioned bus routes lie approximately 250 feet away. The bi-directional Mall Ride bus also lies roughly ¼ mile to the NE.

The following table summarizes the existing context proximate to the subject site:

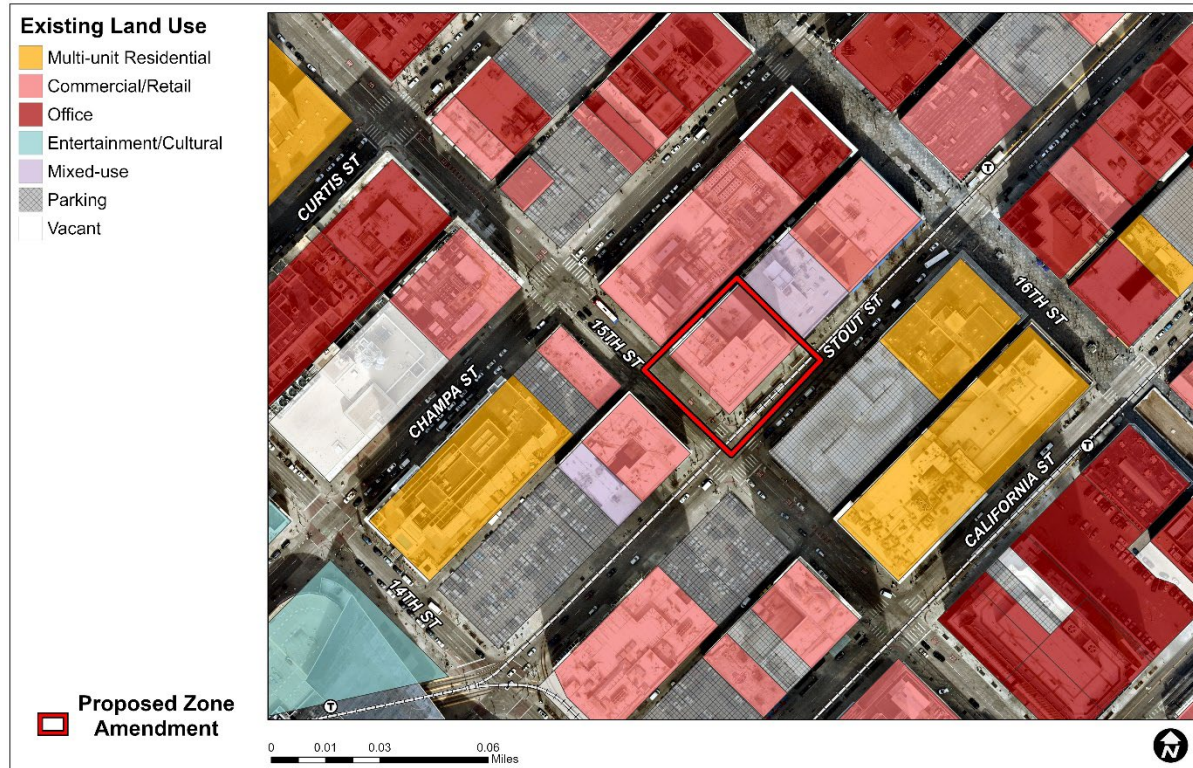
	Existing Zoning	Existing Land Use	Existing Building Form/Scale	Existing Block, Lot, Street Pattern
Site	D-C, UO-1	Commercial / Retail	801 15 th St. - 20 story high-rise hotel building clad with contemporary materials with street level lobby and amenities, beneath 4 stories of parking deck, and 15 stories of hotel rooms above. Pedestrian access is along both 15 th Street. 1525 Stout St. – 1 story low-rise commercial building clad with contemporary materials, with pedestrian access along Stout Street.	Generally regular grid of streets. Block sizes and shapes are consistent and rectangular. Detached sidewalks, amenity zones, or tree lawns. Existing alleys, sometimes vacated. Structured parking and on-street vehicle parking.
Northeast	D-C, UO-1	Retail with Mixed Use	6 story stone-clad mid-rise building (Rio Grande Building), contributing structure to the Downtown Historic District.	
Southeast	D-C, UO-1	Commercial / Parking Garage	7 story above-grade parking garage with street-level retail and access primarily along both Stout Street and secondarily along 15 th Street.	
Southwest	D-C, UO-1	Commercial / Retail	6 story mid-rise hotel building with contemporary cladding, street level lobby and pedestrian access on North Julian Street and North Irving Street	
Northwest	D-TD, UO-1	Commercial - Office	2 story modestly-clad office building with pedestrian access along Champa Street	

2. Existing Zoning



The existing zoning on the subject property is D-C (Downtown Core). Height and form of buildings is generally limited by a floor-area ratio (FAR) base of 10.0, unless the property is eligible for one or more floor area premiums, which increase the FAR. In addition, height and form of buildings are limited by the requirements of a Sunlight Preservation Area. D-C is not regulated by building forms like most other DZC zone districts.

3. Existing Land Use Map



4. Existing Building Form and Scale (All images from Google Maps)



Subject Site (801 15th Street and 1525 Stout Street) - View of the subject property, looking North (on Southern Corner of 15th St. and Stout St.)



Northeast - View of the property to the Northeast of the subject property, looking West on Stout St.



Southeast - View of the property to the Southeast of the subject property, looking East (from intersection of 15th St and Stout St.)



Southwest – View of the property to the Southwest of the subject site, looking Southwest on 15th St.



Northwest - View of property to the Northwest of the subject property, looking East from the W corner of Champa St. and 15th St.

Proposed Zoning

The requested base zone district is D-TD (Downtown Theatre District), is intended for a wide variety of uses, including employment, entertainment, and other higher intensity uses.

In this district (as well as the current D-C zone district), there are no building forms, like those found for most other districts in the Denver Zoning Code. However, maximum height is limited according to Sunlight Preservation Area requirements. In addition, the height and form of buildings is further regulated by a general Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 10.0, that can be increased according to a stipulated table of premiums and transfers of undeveloped floor area from other sites, if certain conditions are met. This flexible scheme allows the form of buildings to accommodate a wide variety of building uses while also preserving sunlight along the street.

The proposed D-TD zone district (like the current D-C zone district) also requires open space on the ground or upper levels of the building for dwelling uses. In addition, 65% of the linear frontage of ground floors must be occupied by active uses along light rail lines, with parking garages held to a higher standard. Other design requirements include high transparency, build-to, sky exposure requirements to achieve pedestrian-friendly urbanism in the downtown environment.

D-TD, UO-1 zone district would allow for large format sign installations to be permitted, subject to the Denver Zoning Code and the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan. The types of signage that are permitted in the D-TD by the Denver Zoning Code include electronic signage, flashing signs, and off-premise advertising (i.e. billboards), in addition to the other types of signs allowed elsewhere throughout Downtown.

All signs in the D-TD are subject to qualitative and quantitative provisions in the Denver Zoning Code Division 10.10, Signs and the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan. Many of these provisions are intended to mitigate impacts on surrounding land uses, with a concentration on residential. These include, for example, a maximum bulb brightness for digital signage of 25 watts [DZC 10.10.14.2; interpreted by staff as 3 LED watts or 220-250 lumens)].

DZC Section 10.10.15, Sign Plan for D-TD, requires that additional sign allowances be further regulated by a District Sign Plan to ensure a “higher standard of design quality for signs” and to mitigate any possible adverse impacts of large format sign installations on surrounding uses.” The Denver Theatre District Sign Plan contains a finer level of detailed standards, intentional and limited locations on specific buildings, and review processes to realize those charges from this section of code. In addition, it requires that 15% of gross revenue generated by off-premise advertising (i.e. billboards) be paid to the DTD to support their provision of public performances, public art, capital improvements in the district, and marketing of the district.

If this rezoning is successful, the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan must also be amended shortly thereafter to include the site. Such an amendment would specify what types of sign can be allowed on specific locations on the 801 15th St building facades. These revisions would be made according to the review criteria stipulated in Section 10.10.15.12 Criteria for Review, which include general parameters

for matters such as types of signs (e.g. fascia-mounted sign) allowed and not allowed and location. Specific to your residential impacts, it includes the following criteria:

Signs shall be oriented or illuminated so that they do not adversely affect existing nearby residential uses or structures. Examples of adverse effects may include but are not limited to glare from intense illumination, and large signs or support structures that visually dominate an area to the detriment of existing or proposed land uses.

The District Sign plan also stipulates a process of design review of sign submittals by the Denver Theatre District, Inc. and city staff, according to specific criteria which again includes considerations such as architectural compatibility, design quality, and compatibility with nearby residential uses. This provides an additional review touchpoint for billboards beyond what is typical in other parts of the city that allow them.

Summary of City Agency Referral Comments

As part of the DZC review process, the rezoning application is referred to potentially affected city agencies and departments for comment. A summary of agency referral responses follows:

Assessor: Approved – No Response.

Asset Management: Approved – No Response.

Denver Public Schools: Approved – No Response.

Development Services - Fire: Approved – No Comments.

Development Services – Project Coordination: Approved – See Comments Below.

All signage will require zoning permit and must comply with zoning code

Development Services - Transportation: Approved – No Response.

Development Services – Wastewater: Approved – See Response.

Parks and Recreation: Approved – No Response.

Department of Transportation & Infrastructure – City Surveyor: Approved – No See Comments Below. The property description from the initial email (801 15th St Rezoning - Property Legal Description.pdf) is the accurate description, not the corrected one later sent out. I converted said pdf into a word docx file for easy copy and paste options.

Public Health and Environment: Approved – No Comments.

Public Review Process

	Date
Receipt of Complete Application - CPD informational notice of receipt of the rezoning application to all affected members of City Council, registered neighborhood organizations, and property owners and tenants within 10 days of application deemed complete:	04/09/2025
Property legally posted for a period of 15 days and CPD written notice of the Planning Board public hearing sent to all affected members of City Council, registered neighborhood organizations, and property owners:	05/19/2025
Planning Board Public Hearing:	06/04/2025
CPD written notice of the Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting sent to all affected members of City Council and registered neighborhood organizations, at least ten working days before the meeting:	06/27/2025
Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the City Council:	07/08/2025 (tentative)
Property legally posted for a period of 21 days and CPD notice of the City Council public hearing sent to all affected members of City Council and registered neighborhood organizations:	07/28/2025 (tentative)
City Council Public Hearing:	08/18/2025 (tentative)

Public Outreach and Input

- **Since Application was Submitted:**
 - **Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs)**
As of the date of this report, staff has not received any written comment from a RNO pertaining to this application.

However, the applicant received letters of support from the Upper Downtown Neighborhood Association (UpDoNA) and the Downtown Denver Business Improvement District (aka Downtown Denver Partnership).
 - **Public Comment**
As of the date of this report, two public comments have been received, one of which is explicitly opposed. Both comments came from residents of the high-rise Spire condominium building on the block to the west of the subject property.

The comment in opposition described that large signs are unsightly, that signs are too numerous in the Denver Theatre District, and that bright lights from signs lights up living spaces of nearby residences and has a negative health impact due to disturbed sleep.

The second comment expressed concern about anticipated negative impacts of light emanating from digital signage, on the character of the block, businesses, and residents. They also questioned what the impact of the rezoning might be on property values and development potential. Lastly, they asked for further information, which was provided by staff in response.

In addition, the applicant also received letters of support from the Colorado Convention Center and Denver Theatre District (DTD).

- **Other Public Comment**

The applicant also submitted evidence of outreach to the Denver Center for Performing Arts.

Criteria for Review / Staff Evaluation

The criteria for review of this rezoning application are found in DZC, Sections 12.4.10.7 and 12.4.10.8, as follows:

DZC Section 12.4.10.7

1. Consistency with Adopted Plans
2. Public Interest
3. Consistency with Neighborhood Context Description, Zone District Purpose and Intent Statements

1. Consistency with Adopted Plans

The following adopted plans apply to this application:

- Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040 (2019)
- Blueprint Denver (2019)
- Downtown Area Plan (2007)

Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040

The proposed rezoning is consistent with many of the adopted *Denver Comprehensive Plan 2040* strategies, including:

- Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods Goal 2 – Enhance Denver’s neighborhoods through high-quality urban design (p. 34).

D-TD allows for flexibility in large-format signage, including digital signage and off-site advertising, within further design limitations stipulated in the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan. Such signage contributes to a unique entertainment district experience by residents, workers, and visitors along the district’s streets

- Economically Diverse and Vibrant, Goal 7 - Accelerate Denver’s economic vitality through arts, culture and creativity (p. 47)
- Economically Diverse and Vibrant, Goal 8 - Expand participation in arts and culture and ensure that arts and culture are accessible to all. (p. 48).

Signage allowed in the Denver Theatre District can contribute to the vibrancy, visual interest, and public safety of the district experience, attracting patrons of the district’s many theatres and other cultural arts venues. In addition, 15% of gross revenue generated by off-site advertising is utilized by the Denver Theatre District for public performance, public art, capital improvements, and marketing, all for the public good.

Blueprint Denver

Blueprint Denver was adopted in 2019 as a supplement to *Comprehensive Plan 2040* and establishes an integrated framework for the city's land use and transportation decisions. *Blueprint Denver* identifies the subject property as part of a Regional Center future place within the Downtown neighborhood context and provides guidance on the future growth strategy for the city.

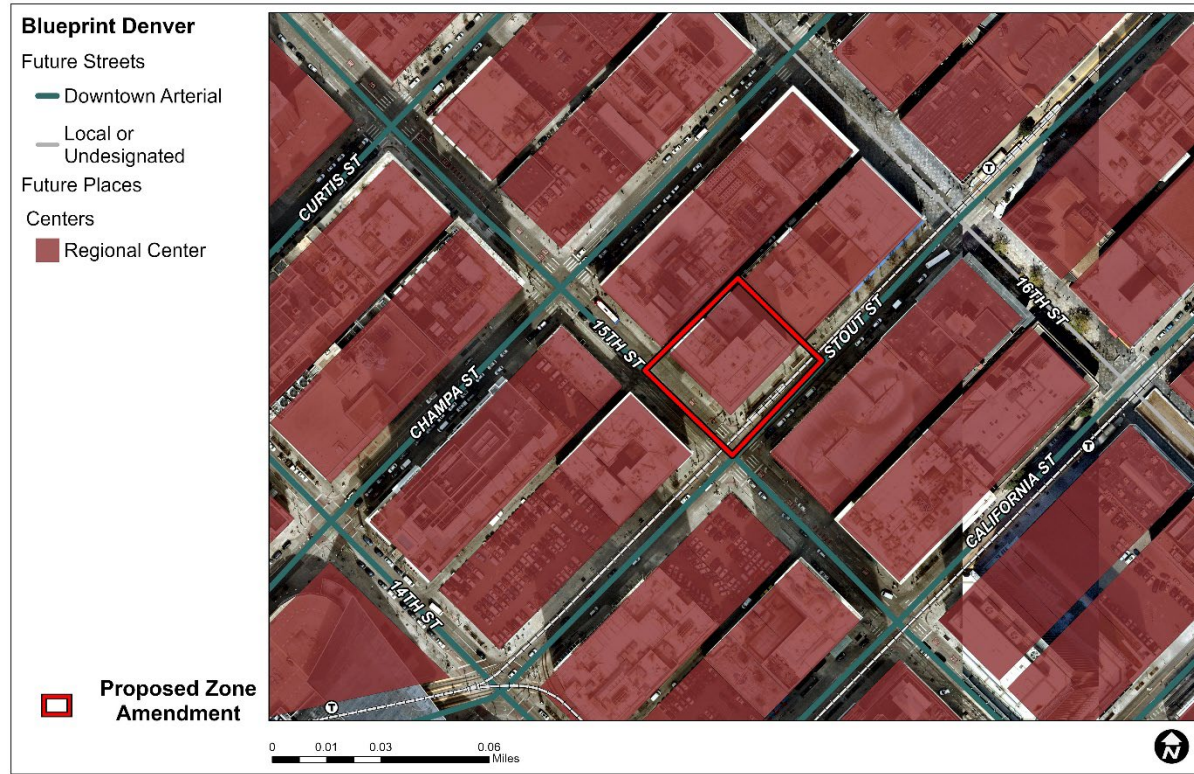
Blueprint Denver Future Neighborhood Context



In *Blueprint Denver*, future neighborhood contexts are used to help understand differences between land use, built form, and mobility at a high scale, between neighborhoods. The subject site is shown on the context map as the Downtown neighborhood context, the description of which is used to guide appropriate zone districts (p. 66). The Downtown neighborhood context is described as offering “greatest level of multimodal connectivity with the greatest access to high-capacity transit” as well as “the highest mix of uses in the city”. This context exhibits walkability due to a “regular grid of streets and availability of diverse transit options.” (p. 265).

D-TD is a zone district within the Downtown neighborhood context and is “specific to an area of the Central Business District associated with the Denver Performing Arts Center, and which specifically enables over-scale, lively, and dynamic billboards and signage to promote Denver’s preeminent entertainment district.” (DZC Section 8.2.2.2). The proposed D-TD zone district is consistent with the *Blueprint Denver* future neighborhood context of Downtown because it will promote the walkability, public safety, and the creative nature of this unique entertainment district.

Blueprint Denver Future Place



The subject site is designated within a Regional Center future place on the *Blueprint Denver* Future Places map. In this place “office, retail, eating and drinking establishments, commercial services and multi-unit residential uses are found mixed throughout.” In comparison to other areas of the city, this place offers the “widest customer draw of all places with a 24/7 live, work and play environment attractive to locals and visitors”. In addition, “structures should respond in form and mass to the streets and public spaces around them,” with a “high degree of urbanism paired with a strong pedestrian realm.” (p. 270).

D-TD is a zone district that allows for a wide variety of land uses within a flexible set of height and form standards for buildings that also ensures a reasonable baseline of urban characteristics as experienced from the adjacent streets. This is consistent with the Downtown future place description, and its mapping on this site.

Blueprint Denver Street Types

In *Blueprint Denver*, street types work together with the future place to evaluate the appropriateness of the intensity of the adjacent development (p. 67). *Blueprint Denver* classifies Stout Street and 15th Street as Downtown Arterial, in which “many trips in Denver start or end downtown, given its large regional draw.” As a result, these streets also have the “highest degree of pedestrian volume.” (p. 276) The proposed D-TD district is consistent with this description because of its pedestrian-friendly urban design standards and high diversity of allowed uses.

Blueprint Denver Growth Strategy



Blueprint Denver's growth strategy map is a version of the future places map, showing the aspiration for distributing future growth in Denver (p. 51). The subject property is part of the "Regional centers" growth area. These areas anticipate experiencing around 50% of new housing growth and 30% of new employment growth by 2040" (p. 51). This growth area is "vibrant" and "mixed-use," and is envisioned as "coordinat[ing] the development of transit supportive land uses" "to provide a variety of housing, jobs and entertainment options within a comfortable distance to all Denverites" (p. 49). The proposed map amendment to D-TD will allow greater flexibility in signage, which could bring additional vibrancy and entertainment to the block faces of the subject property and elsewhere throughout the Theatre District, which in turn can promote more rapid growth in employment and housing in the heart of the city. Therefore, rezoning to D-TD is consistent with the growth strategy.

Blueprint Denver Strategies

Blueprint Denver provides additional recommendations related to rezoning to D-TD.

- Quality of Life Infrastructure Policy 5 (p. 121; bolded text added for emphasis):
 - Strategy B – "Evaluate and revise rules for use of the right-of-way by utilities, **advertisers** and telecommunications providers, **balancing aesthetics** and infrastructure necessities."
 - Strategy C – "Identify **public safety improvements to streets**, including **appropriate levels of lighting**."

- Strategy D – “Prioritize **pedestrian relationships in design** such as building orientation, vehicular access points (minimize curb cuts) and **public wayfinding**.
- Quality of Life Infrastructure Policy 10 (p. 124; bolded text added for emphasis)
 - Strategy A – “**Prioritize street and trail improvements** and connections **leading to and through existing and future centers** and corridors.”

In this case, the requested rezoning to allow for flexible signage, much of which is illuminated elsewhere in the district, could significantly enhance public safety, district branding, and wayfinding by extending the “bright lights district” referred to in the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan, to an important gateway intersection to the heart of the district in both the Northwest and Southwest direction in the orientation of one-way vehicular lanes, bus routes, bike, and light rail routes lanes with unique signs serving as recognizable landmarks.

Climate

This impact of this rezoning on progress towards the city’s goals to reduce climate impacts are negligible. It is possible that expansion of the “bright lights district” referred to in the Denver Theatre District Sign Plan could attract additional visitors, residents, and workers to the city’s core, in comparison to other more distant destinations. If this occurs, total vehicle miles traveled by personal automobiles might be reduced, which can reduce carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions.

Equity

This impact of this rezoning on the city’s equity goals is difficult to assess. *Blueprint Denver* states “Because the data available to measure the **equity** concepts is not available at the parcel-level scale, and they are intended to show patterns across large areas, they cannot be effectively applied to small-scale rezonings” (p. 67). However, smaller rezonings can still implement policies and strategies related to equity. It is possible that this rezoning might improve access to opportunity by creating more equitable access to a greater number of jobs within the transit-served Denver Theatre District, since large format sign installations that might be permitted in the D-TD zone district could contribute to the district’s unique character and brand identity, making it a more attractive area for additional performance venues and other commercial businesses.

Downtown Area Plan

The *Downtown Area Plan* was adopted in 2007. The document is organized by thematic strategies. To make Downtown Denver prosperous, the following two strategies apply to this rezoning and are further described by the “policies, projects, and programs” that specifically align with the proposed rezoning. These include:

- A1: The Downtown of the Rocky Mountain Region (p. 17)
 - “A1c. Create a **brand identity** that promotes Downtown as a place to live, work, play, visit and learn.”
 - “A1e. Cultivate **arts and culture as key economic drivers**”
 - “Retain and **expand the clusters** of world-class arts, cultural, and performance facilities in Downtown.”
- A2: Energizing the Commercial Core (p. 18)

- “Establishment of new destination districts is a key element of energizing the Commercial Core.”
 - “The Theatre District...will have **enhanced signage, venues for outdoor cultural events, and arts-related commercial activities.**
 - “The Visitor District...will contain **a mix of authentic and unique urban retail** that serves both locals and visitors”

In the *Downtown Area Plan*, the subject property is located on the Northwest edge of “Visitor District” focus area, where it abuts the “Theatre District” focus area in the alley between Stout and Champa St. Rezoning this single property on the Stout Street side of the block will certainly meet the description of “Theatre District.” With that said, its impact on the Visitor District adjacent properties along Stout Street could also be beneficial to its focus on unique retail experience, given that vibrant signage is an element of urban street composition that can create a unique and identifiable form and dynamism that may be lacking on blocks without large-format sign installations. In addition, large format sign installations on the subject property might serve as a recognizable gateway element prominently announcing arrival to the district as one travels northwest along 15th Street (towards the “primary activity” areas of the district shown on page 10 the sign plan) and as one travels southwest along Stout Street (towards the primary entrance of the Colorado Convention Center).

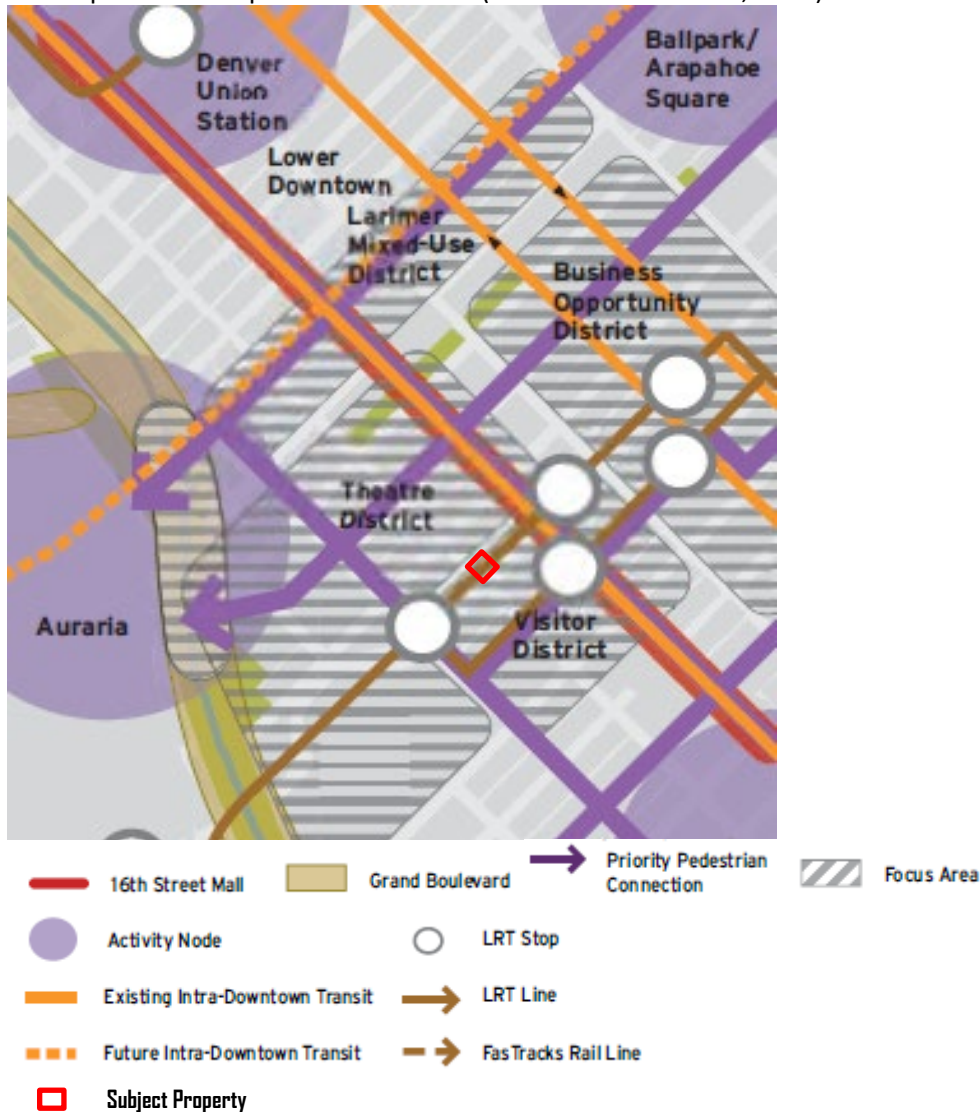
- A4: Clean and Safe (p. 20)
 - “A4d. Install more uniform and consistent **lighting of sidewalks, parks and open spaces**”
- B1: An Outstanding Pedestrian Environment (p. 22)
 - “B1c. Develop a comprehensive **streetscape plan and funding strategy**”
 - “Improve the pedestrian environment on named streets”

In an era and circumstance of ample funding for streetscape improvements by the city, these improvements might be funded as general streetscape improvements in the form of pedestrian lamps. However, in the current era and circumstance of severe financial constraints, the opportunity to realize more uniform and consistent lighting of sidewalks and a better pedestrian environment along Stout Street through electronic signage is one that will open with this rezoning.

In sum, the proposed D-TD zone district is consistent with the recommendations of the Downtown Area Plan in that it would contribute to public safety, pedestrian comfort, and energizing of the commercial core of the city as a unique experience.

It is also important to note an update to the Downtown Area Plan is currently underway, under the leadership of CPD. Policy recommendations related to D-TD expansion at this site or elsewhere have not yet emerged, but are anticipated later this year.

Development Concept Framework Plan (Downtown Area Plan, 2007):



2. Public Interest

The proposed official map amendment furthers the public interest through implementation of the city's adopted land use plans.

3. Consistency with Neighborhood Context Description, Zone District Purpose and Intent Statements

The requested D-TD zone district is within the Downtown Neighborhood Context. The neighborhood context is characterized by a mix of uses. The district is composed of a "regular pattern of block shapes" along "orthogonal and diagonal streets" [DZC, Section 8.1.2 Street, Block and Access Patterns].

Furthermore, “the highest priority is given to the pedestrian, transit, and alternative modes of transportation.” [Section 8.1.6, Mobility]. The corner of 15th St and Stout, and therefore the proposed rezoning to D-TD, is consistent with this neighborhood context description.

Denver Zoning Code Section 8.2.2.1 and 8.2.2.2 state that the general purpose and specific intent of the Downtown Theatre District (D-TD) zone districts is “building use, building form, and design standards” that “specifically enables over-scale, lively, and dynamic billboards and signage to promote Denver’s preeminent entertainment district.”

This site is surrounded on three sides by the D-C zone district, and on one-side by the D-TD zone district, which is identical to the D-C zone district, except that it also allows large format sign installations. Therefore, this proposed rezoning is consistent with the general purpose and specific intent of the D-TD zone district.

Attachments

1. Application
2. Public Comments