



TO: Denver City Council
FROM: Chris Gleissner, Development and Planning Supervisor
DATE: December 8, 2014
RE: 9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Plan

Summary / Staff Recommendation

Community Planning and Development staff finds that the proposed Amendment to the 9th and Colorado Urban Renewal Plan (“Urban Redevelopment Plan”) conforms to Denver’s Comprehensive Plan. In addition, CPD staff finds that the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to the approved 9th and Colorado General Development Plan and Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, and recommends that Planning Board make such finding in addition to its statutory obligation.

9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Area

The Urban Redevelopment Area is located on the former campus of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in the vicinity of East 9th Avenue and Colorado Boulevard, and approximately 3 miles southeast of Downtown Denver’s Central Business District. The Urban Redevelopment Area measures approximately 41 acres immediately east of Colorado Boulevard and bounded by East 11th Avenue on the north and East 8th Avenue on the south. The Urban Redevelopment Area was occupied by the University of Colorado’s medical campus, formerly named the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for approximately 85 years prior to its closure in 2009.

Adjacent users to the 9th and Colorado redevelopment site include the Veteran Affairs Eastern Colorado Health System campus, the Rose Medical Center campus, and the new Broadstone at 9th residential development to the immediate east. The remainder of the nearby surrounding community to the north, south, and west is comprised of a mixture of single family residences, smaller private medical facilities, high-rise condominium buildings, apartments, and small commercial retail businesses.

A conditions study (referred to in state statute as a “blight study”) identified one or more blight factors present on all of the blocks within the Urban Redevelopment Area.



9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Plan

The Urban Redevelopment Plan establishes the Urban Redevelopment Area for 9th and Colorado. The general objectives of the plan are to reduce or eliminate blighted conditions and to stimulate the growth and development of the Urban Redevelopment Area and its surroundings. More specifically, the Urban Redevelopment Plan seeks to encourage a pedestrian-friendly environment, high and moderate density development where appropriate, a mix of land uses and commercial development opportunities, and reuse of existing buildings including historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

Analysis of Comprehensive Plan Conformity

CPD staff finds that the proposed 9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to the Denver Comprehensive Plan and its applicable supplements, as described in more detail below.

Denver Comprehensive Plan (2000)

Denver's Comprehensive Plan 2000 contains numerous objectives and policies relevant to the redevelopment of the 9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Area. CPD staff has completed its analysis and finds that the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to Comprehensive Plan 2000 by furthering several city-wide objectives, policies and actions in the plan, including:

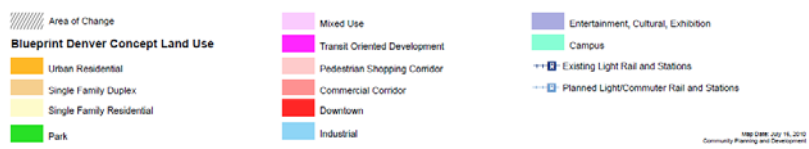
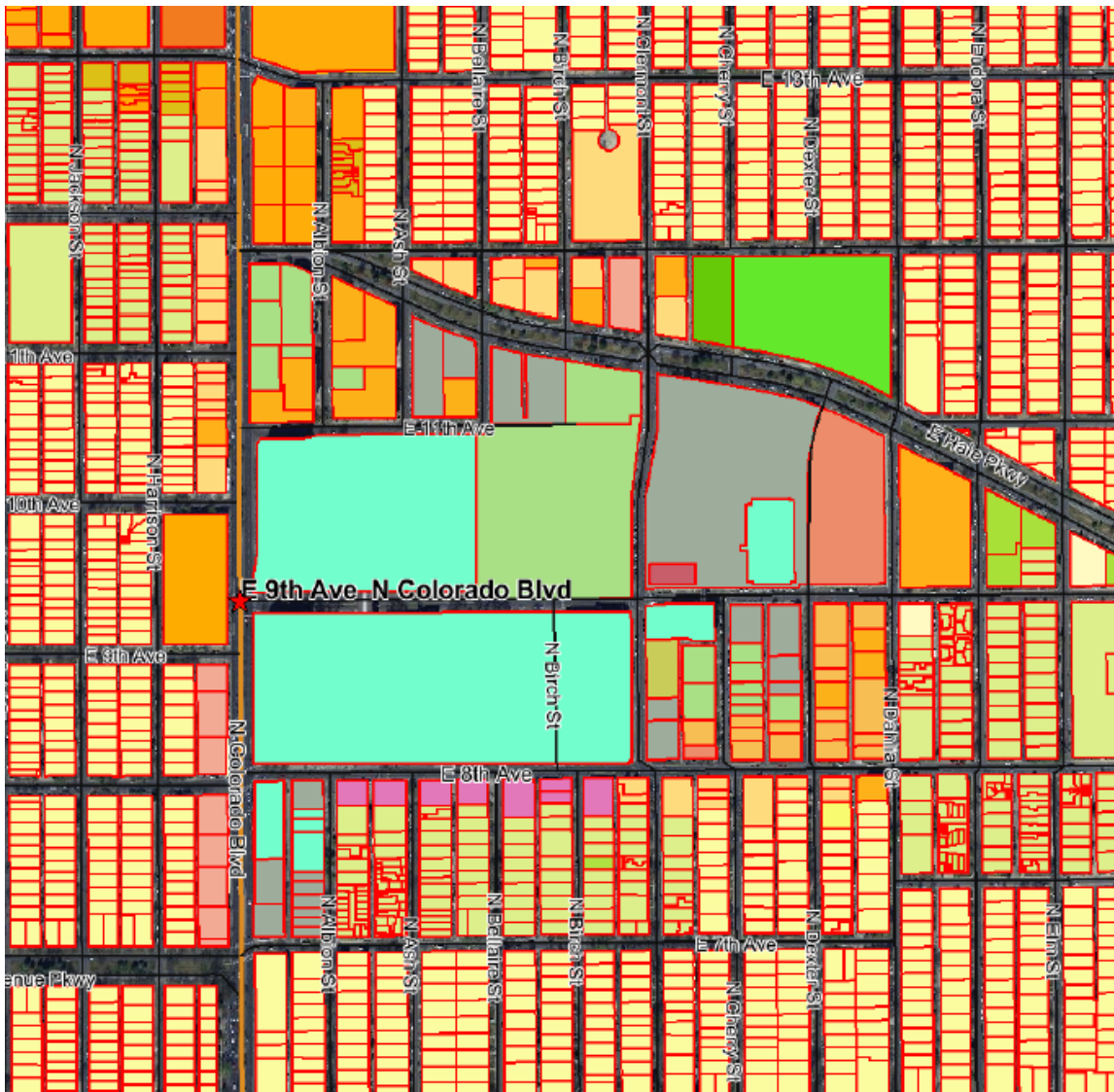
- Conserve land by promoting infill development within Denver at sites where service and infrastructure are already in place, by designing mixed-use communities and reducing sprawl, and by creating more density at transit nodes (Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2-F, Page 39)

- Promote the development of sustainable communities and centers of activity where shopping, jobs, recreation and schools are accessible by multiple forms of transportation, providing opportunities for people to live where they work. (Environmental Sustainability Strategy 4-A, Page 41)
- Encourage development of housing that meets the increasingly diverse needs of Denver’s present and future residents. (Land Use Strategy 1-H, Page 58)
- Encourage quality infill development that is consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood; that offers opportunities for increased density and more amenities; and that broadens the variety of compatible uses. (Land Use Strategy 3-B, Page 60)
- Identify and enhance existing focal points in neighborhoods, and encourage the development of such focal points where none exist. (Land Use Strategy 3-D, Page 60)
- Encourage mixed-use, transit-oriented development that makes effective use of existing transportation infrastructure, supports transit stations, increases transit patronage, reduces impact on the environment, and encourages vibrant urban centers and neighborhoods. (Land Use Strategy 4-A, Page 60)
- Ensure that land-use policies and decisions support a variety of mobility choices, including light rail, buses, paratransit, walking, and bicycling, as well as convenient access for people with disabilities. (Land Use Strategy 4-B, Page 60)
- Promote transit-oriented development (TOD) as an urban design framework for urban centers and development areas. Development at transit stations should provide both higher ridership to the transit system and viability and walkability in the area. (Mobility Strategy 3-B, Page 77).
- Continue to promote mixed-use development, which enables people to live near work, retail, and services. (Mobility Strategy 4-E, Page 78)
- Determine the potential for transit-oriented development at public transit stations, and encourage such opportunities whenever possible. (Mobility Strategy 5-D, Page 79)
- Identify community design and development issues, and target specific concerns with appropriate controls and incentives. (Legacies Strategy 2-C, Page 98)
- Invest in public infrastructure and amenities strategically to promote community identity and attract development. (Design Excellence Strategy 1-E, Page 98)
- Identify areas in which increased density and new uses are desirable and can be accommodated. (Legacies Strategy 3-A, Page 99)
- Create regulations and incentives that encourage high-quality, mixed-use development at densities that will support Denver’s diverse housing needs and public transportation alternatives. (Legacies Strategy 3-B, Page 99)
- Preserve, enhance and extend the pattern and character of the primary street system, including the prevailing grid, interconnected parkways, detached sidewalks and tree lawns. (Compact Urban Development Strategy 4-A, Page 99)
- Focus incentives and design controls on private development fronting major new, existing, and historic roadway corridors, including parkways, boulevards, and avenues citywide. Specifically recognize and address significant intersections and gateways to the city. (Legacies Strategy 4-B, Page 99)
- Integrate sufficient open space and recreational amenities, including small urban parks, into large-scale development plans. (Park and Recreation Strategy 9-B, Page 102)
- Support mixed-use development consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan’s land-use and mobility strategies. (Housing Strategy 6-A, Page 117)

- Identify and capitalize on opportunities to develop housing along transit lines. (Housing Strategy 6-E, Page 118)
- Continue to strengthen and, where necessary, revitalize Denver’s commercial corridors, such as East and West Colfax, Broadway, Colorado Boulevard, East Evans, and South Federal. (Develop Denver’s Business Centers Strategy 4-B, Page 135)
- Use public-private partnerships to facilitate development and redevelopment projects that advance the City’s goals and objectives. When appropriate, take advantage of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority’s powers and experience. (Economic Activity Strategy 4-C, Page 136)
- Ensure high-quality urban design in neighborhoods by strengthening their connections to urban centers and reinforce Denver’s unifying design features such as street trees in the tree lawns. (Neighborhood Strategy 1-D, Page 150).
- Ensure that development provides for mixed uses, allowing people of all income levels the opportunity to find housing near their jobs or find jobs near their homes. (Metropolitan Cooperation Strategy 2-D, Page 216)

Blueprint Denver (2002)

Blueprint Denver, Denver’s integrated land use and transportation plan adopted by the City Council in 2002, identifies the 9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Area as an “Area of Stability,” with a future land use recommendation of “campus.” *See* Blueprint Denver map below. While the Blueprint Denver designations of Area of Stability and campus land use remain applicable to the Urban Redevelopment Area, Blueprint Denver explicitly states that an Area of Stability may accommodate new development and redevelopment and, further, that Areas of Change and Areas of Stability are not mutually exclusive. Blueprint Denver recognizes that even in stable neighborhoods, there often are areas that will benefit from reinvestment and change. In fact, Blueprint Denver anticipates “reinvestment areas” within Areas of Stability that would benefit from substantial reinvestment through infill and redevelopment. Given the departure of the CU medical and hospital campus, leaving behind 18 vacant buildings on an approximately 30-acre campus with substantial challenges to reuse and redevelopment, the Urban Redevelopment Area is arguably one of those Blueprint-envisioned areas for significant change and reinvestment within an otherwise stable area.



Blueprint Denver provides guidance for what redevelopment of the Urban Redevelopment Area should accomplish: the citywide plan endorses the creation of high-density, transit supportive, pedestrian oriented, mixed-use “Town Centers” or “Urban Centers” to accommodate projected employment and resident growth in Denver over the next 20 years. Blueprint Denver also provides guiding principles for redevelopment of the Urban Redevelopment Area, which is surrounded on the north and south by plan-designated stable, residential neighborhoods. The overarching guiding principles for Areas of Stability in Blueprint Denver (p. 14) help guide new projects adjacent to stable neighborhoods:

- Respect valued development patterns
- Respect valued attributes of the area

- Respect adjoining property
- Expand transportation choice
- Minimize traffic impacts on neighborhood streets
- Respect environmental quality

Based on the above analysis, CPD finds that the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to the guiding principles of Blueprint Denver by envisioning redevelopment of the area into an urban, mixed use activity center that will serve the needs of all the surrounding neighborhoods and provide a much-desired community focal point, while respecting the character of surrounding lower-scale commercial and residential areas. Additionally, the URA is adjacent to multiple RTD bus routes along Colorado Boulevard, East 9th Avenue, and East 8th Avenue and therefore redevelopment within the Urban Redevelopment Area supports Blueprint Denver’s guiding principal of expanding transportation choice by locating new development near existing transit lines and services.

Colorado Boulevard Healthcare District Plan (March 1998)

The Colorado Boulevard Healthcare District Plan (“CBHD Plan”) adopted by the City Council in March 1998, includes the entire area covered by the Urban Redevelopment Plan. The CBHD plan did not foresee the departure of the University of Colorado medical school and hospital. Nevertheless, the CBHD plan provides several design and development goals and objectives still relevant today, including:

- Maintain and improve the livability of the surrounding area as an urban, mixed use neighborhood with a vital residential base and strong neighborhood-serving business.
- Mitigate the off-site parking and/or automobile traffic related to the mobility of employees, patients, and visitors in the district.
- Improve the physical appearance of the district.
- Within the district, larger buildings should be concentrated in the center of large sites, gradually decreasing in mass and height toward the site boundaries.
- The scale and buffering of new development should respect the character of buildings across the street.

Based on its analysis, CPD staff finds that the Urban Redevelopment Plan implements the vision and meets the objectives adopted in the CBHD Plan. The Urban Redevelopment Plan will facilitate redevelopment of the site into an urban, mixed-use activity center that will serve the needs of all the surrounding neighborhoods and provide a much-desired community focal point. The Urban Redevelopment Plan and future redevelopment’s compliance with city rules and regulations will also achieve the objective to retain the character of surrounding residential areas by stepping down building height and mass at the area’s boundaries.

Conformance with 9th and Colorado General Development Plan and Urban Design Standards and Guidelines

State statutes do not require a planning board to find that proposed urban renewal plans conform to a municipality’s planning and zoning tools other than its comprehensive plan. However, in Denver, there is a hierarchy of such tools that supports the Planning Board’s further analysis beyond conformity to Comprehensive Plan 2000. In Denver, a General Development Plan (“GDP”), authorized by Denver Zoning Code Section 12.4.12, establishes a framework for future land use and development and

resulting public infrastructure within a specific area. A GDP identifies issues and the development's relationship with significant public infrastructure improvements, such as major multi-modal facilities and connections thereto, major utility facilities, and publicly accessible parks and open spaces. An approved GDP provides a master plan for coordinating development, infrastructure improvements, and regulatory decisions as development proceeds within the subject area.

CPD staff finds that redevelopment of the Urban Redevelopment Plan will conform to the planning vision and urban design objectives approved in the GDP. The GDP envisions creation of an urban center within the 9th and Colorado Urban Redevelopment Area through integration of a mix of housing, commercial uses, and publicly accessible and useable open spaces. More specifically, the Urban Redevelopment Plan's objectives are consistent with the following GDP objectives:

- Create a neighborhood that integrates multiple uses, including commercial, office, retail, hotel, live-work possibilities, residential, public services, and appropriate public spaces.
- Establish a hierarchy and network of corridors that provides safe and comfortable routes for pedestrians, bicycle, and automobile traffic.
- Coordinate the overall plan, building massing, and connectivity together with design elements to create a desirable, unique environment which encourages a variety of activities including: strolling, sitting, conversing, relaxing, and interacting.
- Introduce Denver's street grid into the site and provide streets with unique image and character, creating a walkable district planned as a cohesive development hosting a variety of activities.
- Develop open spaces to serve multiple needs.
- Enhance the Nurses' Dormitory Lawn as open space.
- Provide a broad mix of housing types, densities and price ranges (including affordable housing).
- Create a unique, distinctive, and identifiable development that establishes and promotes connectivity and access across neighborhoods.
- Development should encourage the guiding principles from Blueprint Denver such as land use that provides a variety of transportation alternatives, access to mass transit, a variety of employment opportunities, multimodal streets, an Urban Center area, and parks and open space that preserve existing vegetation and trees.

Planning Board Finding

Planning Board reviewed the Amendment to the 9th and Colorado Urban Renewal Plan and voted unanimously to recommend to city council that the plan amendment to the 9th and Colorado Urban Renewal Plan for Proposed Continuum Campus Project and New TIF Area for the area located between 8th and 11th Avenues and Colorado Boulevard and Bellaire Street, conforms with Denver's adopted Comprehensive Plan and supplements.

CPD Staff Recommendation

Based on the analysis presented in this staff report, CPD staff recommends to city council that the plan amendment to the 9th and Colorado Urban Renewal Plan for Proposed Continuum Campus Project and New TIF Area for the area located between 8th and 11th Avenues and Colorado Boulevard and Bellaire Street, conforms with Denver's adopted Comprehensive Plan and supplements.