



Denver Planning Board
Joel Noble, Chair

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TO: Denver City Council
FROM: Joel Noble, Chair, Denver Planning Board
CC: Tracy Huggins, Executive Director, Denver Urban Renewal Authority
DATE: September 14, 2018
RE: Proposed Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan

Planning Board Finding

The Denver Planning Board is pleased to forward its finding to City Council that the proposed amendment to the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan for the Emily Griffith Project conforms with Denver Comprehensive Plan 2000 and its applicable supplements and that it meets the objectives of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan. Planning Board made its finding and recommended that City Council approve the proposed amendment by unanimous vote at its regular meeting on September 5, 2018.

Planning Board Authority

Colorado Revised Statutes 31-25-107(2) requires that a jurisdiction's planning board or commission make a finding that a proposed urban renewal plan conforms with the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. City Council approved the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) in August 2017. At the time, no projects were included in the URP. The proposed amendment would add the Emily Griffith project within the existing Emily Griffith Opportunity School Redevelopment Area (URA). If approved by City Council, the Emily Griffith Project would become an urban renewal project and would be eligible to use tax increment financing within the Emily Griffith Opportunity School URA.

Analysis of Comprehensive Plan Conformity

At the Planning Board meeting, CPD staff presented a summary and staff recommendation that the proposed amendment to the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms with the adopted plans that apply to the area, including Denver Comprehensive Plan 2000, Blueprint Denver (2002), and the Downtown Area Plan (2007). For details regarding the analysis that informed the Planning Board consideration and finding, please see the attached Planning Board staff report.

Attachments

1. CPD Planning Board staff report



TO: Denver Planning Board
FROM: Elizabeth Weigle, AICP, Senior City Planner
DATE: August 28, 2018
RE: Amendment to Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan for the Emily Griffith Project

Summary and Recommendation

Colorado law charges Denver's Planning Board with reviewing an urban renewal plan and making a recommendation as to its conformity with the Comprehensive Plan (Colorado Revised Statutes Title 31 Government Municipal § 31-25-107(2)). Community Planning and Development staff finds that the proposed amendment to the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) conforms to Denver's Comprehensive Plan and applicable supplements and recommends that the Planning Board take formal action at its September 5, 2018 meeting to make this finding. In addition, CPD staff finds that the proposed amendment meets the objectives of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan, and recommends that Planning Board make such finding in addition to its statutory obligation.

Emily Griffith Project

City Council approved the Emily Griffith Urban Redevelopment Plan in August 2017. At the time, no projects were included in the URP. The proposed amendment would add the Emily Griffith project within the existing Emily Griffith Opportunity School Redevelopment Area (URA). The boundaries of the project coincide with the boundaries of the URA, which is a one-block area in Downtown Denver bounded by Welton Street to the northwest, 13th Street to the northeast, Glenarm Place to the southeast, and 12th Street to the southwest.

The URA and project area are comprised of approximately 106,400 square feet (2.44 acres). The area is zoned D-C UO-1 (Downtown Core with a Use Overlay for Adult Uses). A portion of the project area is also within a Mountain View Plane from the State Capitol and is subject to height restrictions. The Emily Griffith Opportunity School is also a locally designated historic landmark, and the project is subject to Landmark Preservation Commission review and approval. In July 2018, the Commission approved a Phase 1: Mass, Form and Context submittal with conditions that some of the glass structure proposed be removed and that window opening sizes along Welton Street not be altered.

The proposal is a mixed-use project that will adaptively reuse the Emily Griffith Opportunity School buildings on the site. The project consists of a 140,000 square-foot hotel with 250 rooms and 6,000 square feet of meeting space, proposed to be located in the historic building on Welton Street. The existing buildings on the Glenarm Place portion of the site will be converted into 37,500 square feet of retail and office uses and a 120-space parking structure. The project will also include an activated alley between Welton Street and Glenarm Place, which will provide vehicular drop-off access to the hotel and pedestrian circulation between the various uses on the site. Please see the attached memo from the

Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) for more information and illustrative renderings of the proposed project.



Emily Griffith Opportunity School Project and URA Boundary



Project site, View from Welton Street and 12th Street looking northeast (Source: Google Streetview)



Project Site, View from Glenarm Place and 13th Street looking northwest (Source: Google Streetview)

Emily Griffith School Urban Redevelopment Plan and Area

The proposed redevelopment project is located within the existing Emily Griffith School Urban Redevelopment Area (URA). City Council approved the URA and accompanying Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP) in 2017, authorizing a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) area but without identifying projects to be financed with TIF. Therefore, the URP must be amended to add the project to the URP. If approved, the Emily Griffith Project would become an urban renewal project and would be eligible to use TIF within the Emily Griffith Opportunity School URA.

CPD staff finds that the proposed project meets the following objectives of the Emily Griffith School Urban Redevelopment Plan (pages 15-16):

- To eliminate the present factors which contribute to the blight in the Urban Redevelopment Area; such blighting factors are detrimental to the community and limit the development potential of the surrounding area
- To renew and improve the character and environment of the Urban Redevelopment Area and its surroundings by enhancing and improving an existing historical landmark building which will prevent or ameliorate economic, physical, and environmental deterioration
- To encourage commercial, residential and retail development and redevelopment that is socially and economically inclusive and from which the Urban Redevelopment Area and its environs can draw economic strength
- To encourage and protect existing development within and immediately adjoining the Urban Redevelopment Area by creating conditions from which these areas can draw new economic strength
- To more effectively use underdeveloped land within the Urban Redevelopment Area
- To encourage land use patterns within the Urban Redevelopment Area and its environs where pedestrians are safe and welcome

- To encourage the participation of existing property owners within and adjacent to the Urban Redevelopment Area in the redevelopment of their property
- To encourage the reuse of existing buildings where appropriate, including historic preservation and adaptive reuse
- To improve and provide for employment centers at areas proximate to multimodal transit centers and access
- To improve the economy of the City by stabilizing and upgrading property values
- To protect and enhance the existing character of Denver structures designated for historic preservation
- To encourage high and moderate density development where appropriate, including structured parking
- To achieve goals as outlined in adopted City Plans

Planning Board Authority

Colorado Revised Statutes 31-25-107(2) requires Denver's Planning Board to determine whether the proposed amendment to the Emily Griffith Urban Redevelopment Plan to add the Emily Griffith Project conforms with the City's Comprehensive Plan. DURA will convey the Planning Board finding to City Council.

Analysis of the Comprehensive Plan Conformity

CPD staff finds that the proposed amendment conforms to the Denver Comprehensive Plan and its applicable supplements, Blueprint Denver and the Downtown Area Plan, as described in detail below.

Denver Comprehensive Plan (2000)

CPD staff finds that the proposed amendment to the Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to Comprehensive Plan 2000 by furthering several city-wide objectives, policies and actions in the plan, including the following (with reference to Comprehensive Plan 2000):

- Conserve raw materials by promoting efforts to adapt existing buildings for new uses, rather than destroying them (Environmental Sustainability Strategy, 2-E, Page 39);
- Provide market-based incentives and tax incentives to encourage sustainable development (Environmental Sustainability Strategy, 3-D, Page 41);
- 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);
- Promote standards and incentives for design that enhance the quality and character of the city, including the preservation of significant historic structures and features (Legacies Strategy, 1-B, Page 98);
- Preserve Denver's architectural and design legacies while allowing new ones to evolve (Legacies Strategy, 1-C, Page 98);
- Identify areas in which increased density and new uses are desirable and can be accommodated (Legacies Strategy, 3-A, page 99);

- Leverage City resources to protect Denver’s Landmarks and eligible historic buildings and to avoid their demolition (Legacies Strategy, 6-D, Page 101);
- Ensure Downtown’s future as Denver’s preeminent center for business, tourism, and entertainment, including through continued support of the reuse of historic buildings in and around Downtown (Economic Activity Strategy, 4-A, Page 134); and
- 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).

Blueprint Denver (2002)

Blueprint Denver, Denver’s integrated land use and transportation plan adopted by City Council in 2002, identifies the project site as being located within an “Area of Change” with the concept land use of “Downtown.”

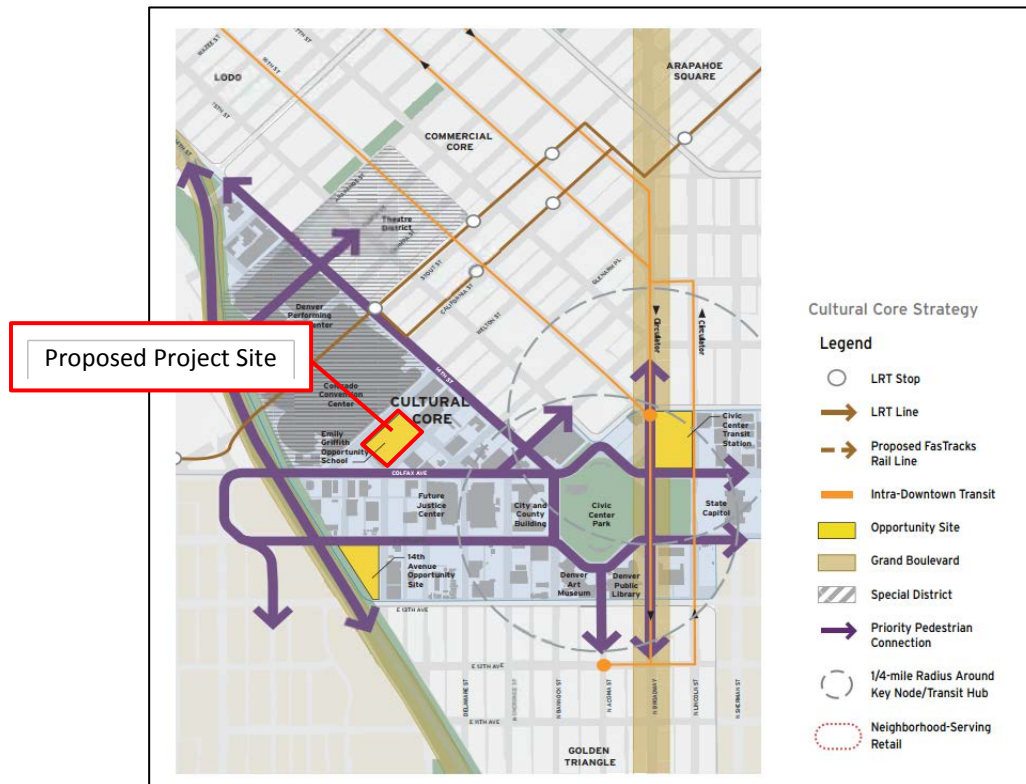
Regarding Areas of Change, Blueprint Denver states, “The purpose of Areas of Change is to channel growth to where it will be beneficial and can best improve access to jobs, housing, and services with fewer and shorter auto trips. Areas of Change are parts of the city where most people agree that development or redevelopment would be beneficial” (page 127). It further goes on to state that “a major goal is to increase economic activity in the area to benefit existing residents and businesses, and where necessary, provide the stimulus to redevelop” (page 127).

Blueprint Denver recognizes Downtown as “the centerpiece of the City and region with the highest intensity of uses in Colorado” (page 39). Blueprint Denver further states that Downtown “has the most intense land-use development and transportation systems,” and the vision is to “to continue more of the same types of high quality office, hotel, retail, residential and mixed-use development” (page 234). The proposed project is consistent with the intent and vision for Areas of Change and the Downtown concept land use.

Downtown Area Plan (2007)

The Downtown Area Plan identifies several strategies and objectives to serve as a “tool to help community leaders, decision makers, and citizens build upon Downtown’s assets and guide future development” (page 1). The long-term vision seeks to “achieve a vibrant, economically healthy, growing and vital downtown through a sustained effort in each of these elements: Prosperous, Walkable, Diverse, Distinctive and Green” (page 12).

As specified within the Downtown Area Plan, the project site is located within the Cultural Core. The Cultural Core is generally defined in the Downtown Area Plan as the area encompassing the Convention Center, Denver Performing Arts Center, Civic Center Park, Denver Public Library, Denver Art Museum, Denver Public Library, and various municipal and government buildings along 14th Street extending south to 13th Avenue and Lincoln Street to the east. A key recommendation identified in the plan calls for the creation of a “mixed-use, public-private development that includes the Emily Griffith Opportunity School and other complementary uses” (page 45). Though the Emily Griffith Opportunity School moved to another location, the project site is consistent with the recommendation for mixed-use development in this area.



Cultural Core Strategy, Downtown Area Plan

In addition, the proposed project is consistent with the following goals and policies outlined in the plan (with references to Downtown Area Plan):

- Preserve, reuse, and reinvest in historic buildings and places throughout Downtown. These buildings and places demonstrate to future generations Denver’s pre-eminence as a western city over the past 150 years (A Prosperous City Vision Element A1g, Page 17);
- Retain and reuse historic buildings to fortify the district identity of districts (A Distinctive City Vision Element D1c, Page 33); and
- Develop a Downtown-wide strategy to reduce resource consumption, especially energy, water and materials, and to reduce greenhouse gas emission through encouraging the reuse of existing building to retain embedded energy (A Green City Vision Element E3a, Page 39).

CPD Staff Recommendation

Based on the analysis presented in this staff report, CPD staff recommends that the Planning Board find the proposed amendment to the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan conforms to the Denver Comprehensive Plan and its applicable supplements, and furthermore meets the objectives of the Emily Griffith Opportunity School Redevelopment Plan.

Attachments

1. Planning Board Memorandum
2. Emily Griffith Opportunity School Urban Redevelopment Plan