

Denver's South Platte River Technical Advisory Panel



REI, 1416 PLATTE ST.
DENVER, CO

OCTOBER 8, 2021



THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE MISSION

Provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.



Technical Advisory Panels

What are they?

- Help solve challenging land use issues.
- Composed of ULI Colorado members who volunteer their time to offer unbiased, third-party professional advice.
- Since 2004, conducted more than 60 TAPs throughout Colorado.

Meet Our Panelists



TAP Chair Meredith Wenskosi,
President and Owner,
Livable Cities Studio



Mark Johnson,
President,
Civitas



Bill Mahar,
Principal,
Norris Design



Susan Powers,
President,
Urban Ventures



Renee Martinez-Stone,
Director, West Denver
Renaissance Collaborative



Andrew Knudtsen,
Managing Principal,
Economic & Planning Systems



Brian Murphy,
Founder and Principal Engineer,
River Works

The Project Scope

Examine approaches to planning, public realm and building design, and riverfront improvements that would facilitate the City's vision for development to improve access and river function, provide for a mix of uses and demographics, and foster equitable mobility and recreational access to and along the water.

Topics addressed:

- Type, uses, and scale of buildings
- Interface between development and the river
- Building placement, setbacks and public realm
- Publicly-accessible river access and private development
- Opportunities to encourage private investment in river revitalization efforts

Stakeholder Interviews

Mobility

- Peter Baertlein, Director, Implementation, DOTI
- Emily Gloeckner, Director, Transportation Engineering, DOTI
- Sam Piper, Principal Planner, Denver Moves Everyone PM, DOTI
- Justin Begley, Transit, DOTI
- David Krutsinger, Director, Transit, DOTI

Land Use & Environment

- Grace Rink, Director, CASR
- Laura Aldrete, Executive Director, CPD
- Matthew Karnes, Chief Operating Officer, DEDO
- Sarah Nurmela, Planning & Implementation Manager, CPD
- Fernando Abhud, OV Consulting

Water Resources

- Dave Jula, Water Resources Engineer, DOTI
- Barb Chongtoua, MHFD
- Ryan Aids, Greenway Foundation
- Greg Johnson, USACE Omaha District

Housing and Equity

- Erin Clark, ULC
- Council member Jamie Torres, City Council District 3
- Council member Debra Ortega, at large

Development

- Brad Buchanan, National Western
- Kirsty Greer, McWhinney

Parks, Recreation, & Urban Design

- Gordon Robertson, Director, Planning, Design & Construction, DPR
- Mark Bernstein, Chief of Staff, DPR, Former Downtown Area Project Manager
- Sarah Cawrse, Senior Planner, Urban Design, CPD
- Gretchen Wilson, Dig Studio



Findings

Findings: What We Heard

Challenges

- Everyone and no one owns the river. No clear leadership.
- Degraded ecosystem health
- Safety
- Connectivity and access
- Wayfinding and visibility
- Homelessness
- Industrial uses along the river
- Infrastructure, like railroad and highway
- Conflicting needs of stakeholders



Findings: What We Heard

Assets & Opportunities

- The river is a major asset to the city and region
- Opportunity for additional stakeholder coordination, and a designated point person for the river
- Opportunity for a more uniform process for development along the river
- Existing groups of river stakeholders
- The City's Needs Assessment is underway
- Opportunities for nodes and links along the river



A grayscale background image showing a close-up of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, both holding pens and pointing towards a table covered with papers and documents. The image is slightly blurred, emphasizing the hands and the writing instruments.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

Key Drivers and Goals

- Address **climate change** and provide space for the river to be a **healthy ecological corridor**
- **Equity** – Ensure the South Platte river, Denver's most valued and historic asset, is accessible and contributes to the quality of life **of all residents**
- **Reorient to the river** and enhance the river corridor as a primary public space for Denver residents

Two recommendations:

- South Platte River Corridor Plan
- Governance



RECOMMENDATION #1

South Platte River Corridor Plan

South Platte River Corridor Plan

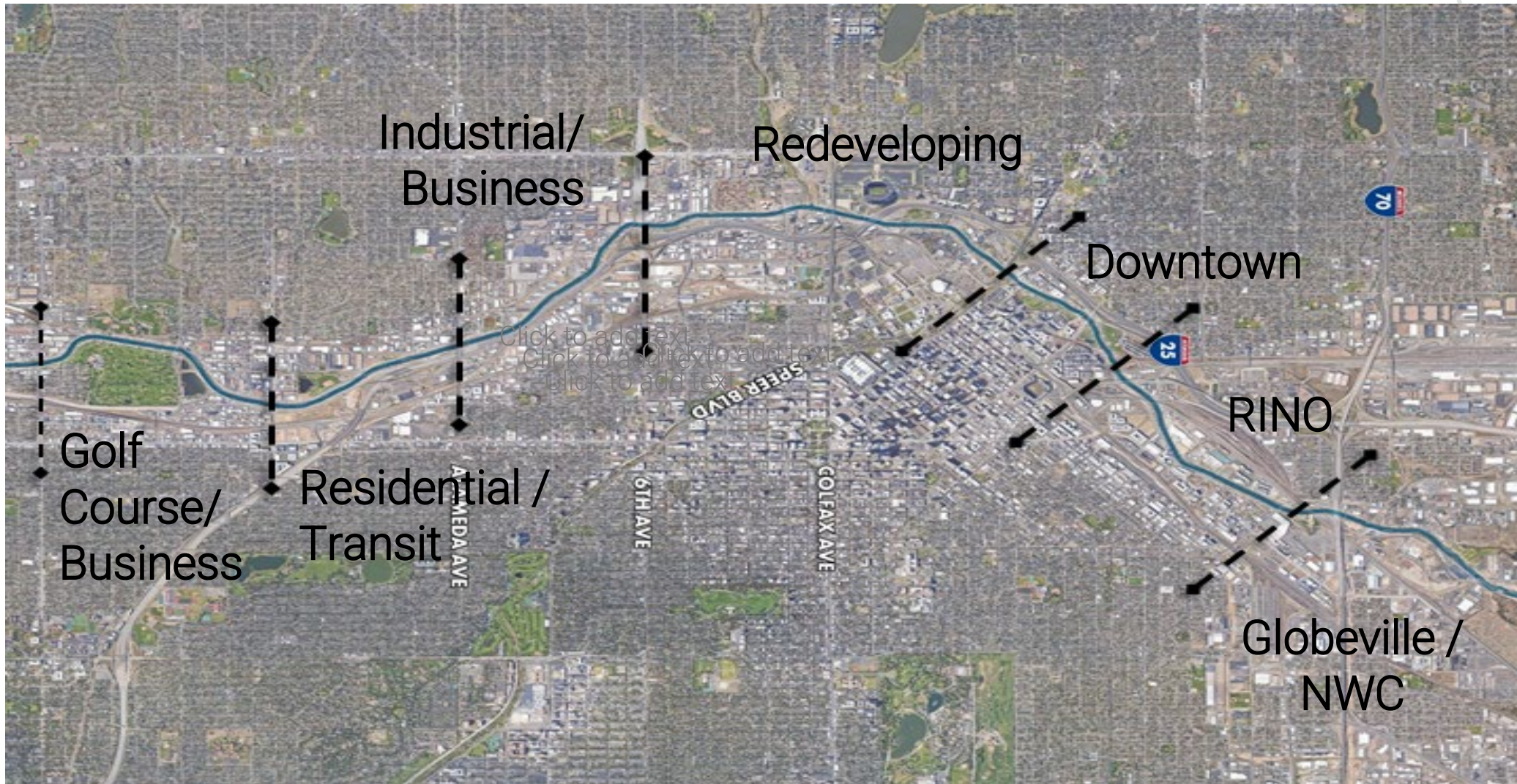
Creating a Regulatory Framework

- Why?
 - Past plans have been standalone and not regulatory
 - Lack of cross-departmental coordination
- Purpose:
 - Elevate the importance of the natural system as a key public asset within Denver
 - Improve the health of our river ecosystem
 - Honor and respect the history of the river, indigenous cultures, and the varied character
 - Identify preservation of industrial sites given their economic value
 - Provide clear guidance for decision-making and coordinated leadership
- Two-Fold Approach:
 - South Platte River Corridor Plan
 - Based on character zones
 - Design Standards and Guidelines



South Platte River Corridor Plan

People, Places, Culture and History



South Platte River Corridor Plan

Character Zones

- Define and shape Neighborhood Nodes
- Support overall riverfront systems
 - Mobility
 - Ecology & natural systems
 - Diversity of recreation and placemaking opportunities
 - Guidelines and regulations
 - Overlay approach



South Platte River Corridor Plan – EQUITY



River Zone Overlay

River Corridor – restore, natural, trails, open space

River Benefit – *universal accessibility & amenities*. This can be private or public property; will vary based on context. Can be private plaza, trail connection, park or street that provides community access (will vary by ROW conditions)

River Incentive Area – *adjacent zone for improved access, housing diversity, affordable housing, and higher density* with orientation to the river. Height a function of lot size, not adjacent uses.

South Platte River Corridor Plan - EQUITY



River Benefit
varies in size

South Platte River Corridor Plan - EQUITY



River
Benefit
varies

South Platte River Corridor Plan

Culture + Recreation Opportunities



The River Mile

South Platte River Corridor Plan

Culture + Recreation Opportunities



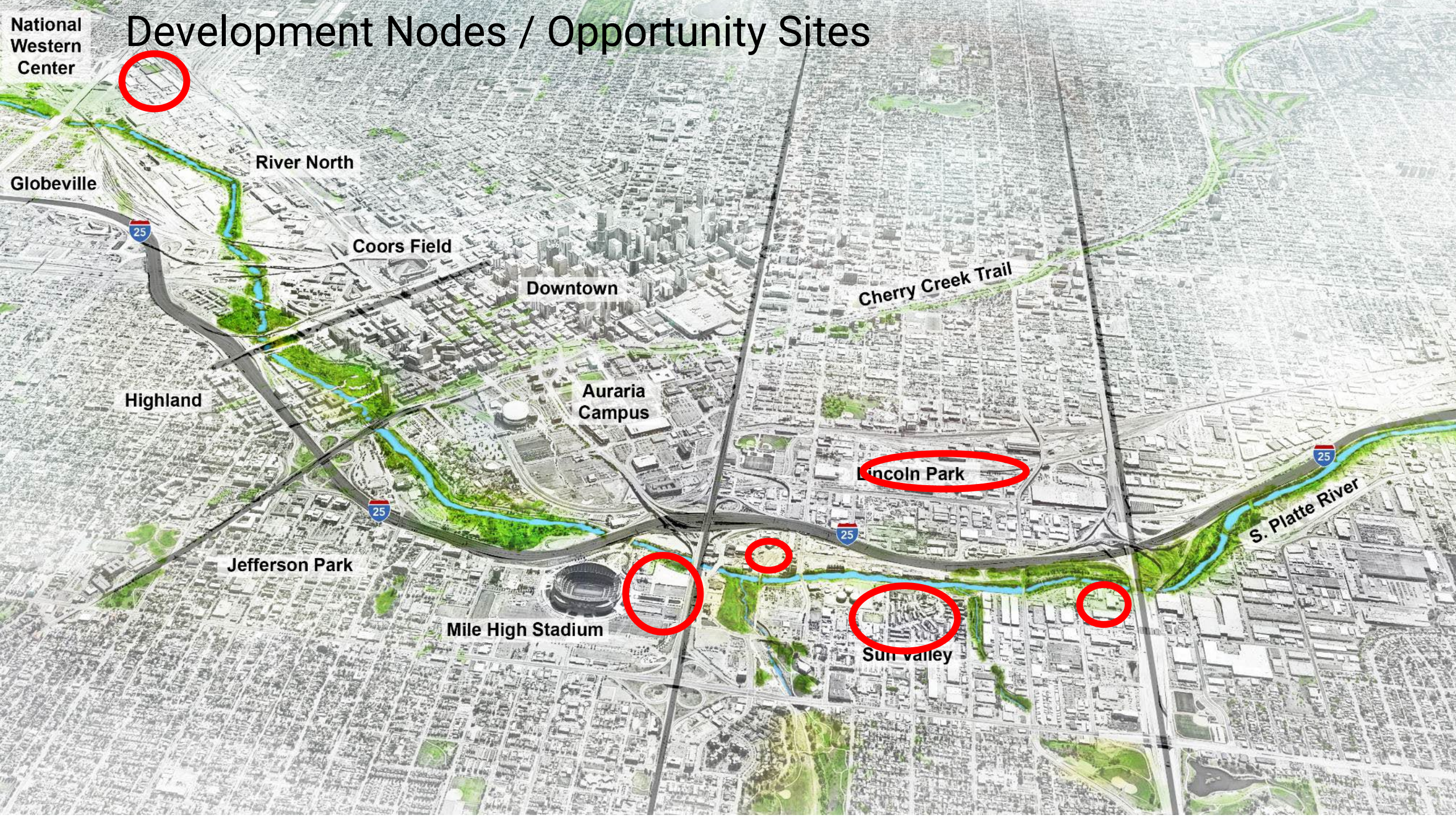
Sun Valley Cultural Plaza



RiNo Art Park



Indigenous Landscapes



Development Nodes / Opportunity Sites

National Western Center



River North

Globeville



Coors Field

Downtown

Cherry Creek Trail

Highland

Auraria Campus



Jefferson Park

Mile High Stadium



S. Platte River



Sun Valley

Development Nodes / Opportunity Sites



Burnham Yards



Pepsi Bottling Plant



Robinson Dairy



Zuni Power Plant

Design Standards and Guidelines

Access	community, neighborhood, block, parcel
Connections & Mobility	transit, car, bike, pedestrian, universal mobility options
Community stewardship/ownership in Character Zones	culture, art, custom identity features, heritage elements (i.e. native edible planting areas); wayfinding Public space:
Resilience & Health	natural areas, access to parks, social interaction, identity recognition, safety
Public Realm	Transition from private property to South Platte River Corridor amenities
Adjacent Development	Incentives: setback and improvements for density, mixed use, custom solutions Frontages

Design Standards and Guidelines

- Standards and guidelines that are consistent for entire corridor with variation between character zones
- Incentivized approach
 - Point-based system for guidelines to encourage the design of high-quality public spaces and design, culture, art, etc.
 - Incentives can change per character zone
 - Currently under development for Sun Valley

Culturally Based Community/Public Art

INTENT

1. To establish Sun Valley as a leader in diverse culturally based public art.
2. To elevate the presence of local artists within Sun Valley.
3. To add visual interest.
4. To celebrate the various cultures within Sun Valley.

STANDARDS

1. Public art shall be incorporated into each parcel either by incorporating art into the public realm, or on an external wall of the building.
2. Art shall be incorporated into the 10th Avenue linear open space and within the riverfront park.
3. Public art shall be placed in highly visible locations and serve as beacons to draw trail users into the district.



Public art shall be incorporated into each parcel either by incorporating art into the public realm, or on an external wall of the building.



Add visual interest.

GUIDELINES POINTS

	MAX POINTS	YOUR SCORE
The project includes high quality murals, or graphic treatments on blank walls facing alleys or other underutilized spaces.	1	
Public art installed as part of the project connects to community through story telling or other themes.	1	
Local (Sun Valley) artists are selected for murals or public art installed by the project.	1	
Local (Sun Valley) residents, youth and artists are involved in the design and/or selection of public art or artists.	1	
Developments include space for culturally relevant ground-floor tenants and/or space for community related meetings and programs.	1	
Development includes ground-floor space for existing resident-owned businesses.	1	
TOTAL		



RECOMMENDATION #2

Governance

Governance and Finance

Overarching Goals for Structure and Revenues

There are many options for a future structure. Any consideration should fulfill these goals:

1. Provide clarity and leadership
2. Advance concepts within this report addressing river quality and treatment of the public realm
3. Establish momentum that can be sustained with changes in elected officials and staff
4. Coordinate wide ranging governing entities with overlapping jurisdictional interests (Corp of Engineers, Mile High Flood District, CDOT, multiple departments within the City, etc.)
5. Generate revenue streams and leverage them using city, state, and federal sources to address O&M needs and capital projects
6. Ensure private investment along the river advances the larger goals identified in this plan

Financial Needs and Sources

■ Capital

- Look to existing **public entities** to continue to fund large **capital improvements** in the corridor:
 - Army Corp of Engineers – current effort in play to allocate \$400M to the South Platte
 - Mile High Flood District – revenues increased recently from election ("DeBruced") that enabled organization to retain revenues, doubling revenues to \$6M for the region, portions which are dedicated to the South Platte.
 - City and County of Denver – commitments of approximately \$30M over past decade, with contributions from GoCo, Natural Resources Damages Funds, Mile High Flood District, and other funds
 - City departments, such as DOTI, Parks. Note that 2A funds generate \$40M annually, with limited deployment within the river corridor
 - Potential for Bond Projects

■ Operations and Maintenance

- Will have greater needs for O&M in the future, to address current needs and growing demand over time
- Parks maintains trails, with current annual operating budget commitments to the corridor

■ Public Private Partnerships

- Goal is to leverage the river asset to generate private sector investment
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) an important element to help form PPP. DURA will be an important partner.

Governance and Finance

Options for Governance – Overview of Options

A – South Platte River Entity

- Non-profit organization that could be newly formed or could use existing organization
- Functions autonomously from the City
- Funding recommended to be quarter cent sales tax or property tax mil levy, applied to entire city, approved by ballot measure
- Public accountability through reporting to Mayor/Council annually

B – South Platte General Improvement District

- District operates as a subset of the City
- Board appointed by mayor
- Typically GIDs are staffed with City employees and would function as part of the City
- Funding recommended to be a low mill levy (for example 4 to 8 mills) within the GID
- GID expands incrementally based on requests for entitlements and permits

C – New District or Modification of Existing District

- Look to existing entity for greater commitment to the Denver reach of South Platte
- Could become a division within an existing District
- Funding recommended to be an increase in mill levy for Denver property owners, approved by election

Governance and Finance

Evaluation of Option A – South Platte River Entity

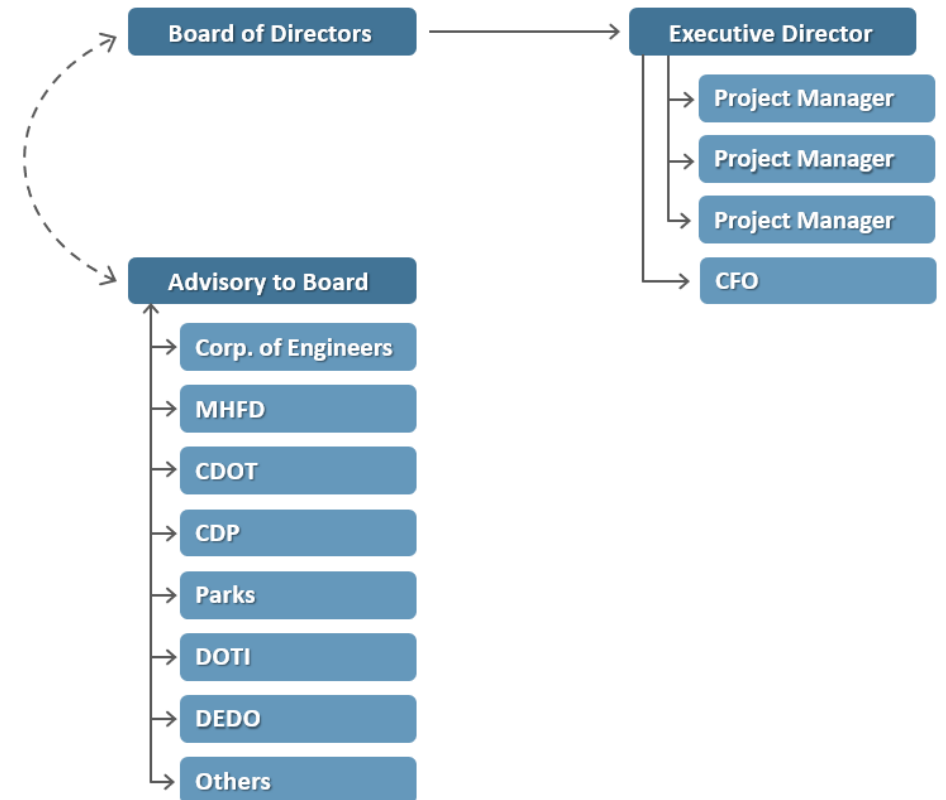
■ Pros

- Autonomy from City enables organization to be nimble
- Entity solely focused on the river
- Funding could be substantial. Quarter cent sales tax translates to \$42 M annually.
- Financial support across the city, as sales tax or property tax levied city-wide, to provide a benefit for the entire region

■ Cons

- Funding relies on successful outcome of City election

South Platte River Entity



Governance and Finance

Evaluation of Option B – South Platte River General Improvement District

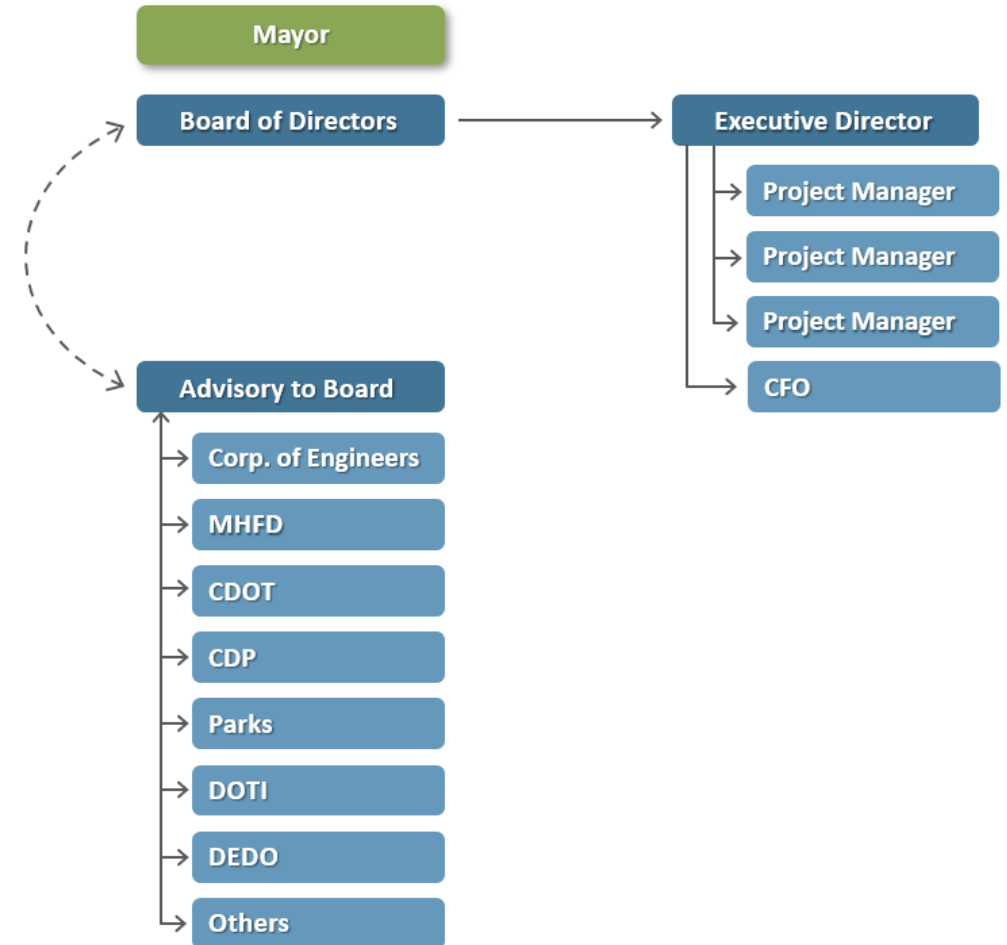
■ Pros

- No election needed. Governance formation and revenue source can be executed within current framework
- Mayoral board appointees provides City oversight of governance
- Typically board composition reflects property owners who pay the property tax

■ Cons

- Limited funding potential, only taxes property owners on the river corridor
- Limited revenue potential, compared to sales tax.
- Organization led by a 'Division Head' may have potential to get lost within the larger City entity
- Board composition would need to be structured to address needs for inclusivity

South Platte River Authority



Governance and Finance

Evaluation of Option C – District Formation or Expansion

■ Pros

- District formation could create new organization or modify existing district
- Tapping existing entity provides known organizational structure
- To achieve necessary focus on the Denver reach of the South Platte, may need to create a subsidiary
- Greater degree of autonomy provides potential for greater focus on South Platte River corridor needs

■ Cons

- Limited revenue potential, given the existing funding base
- May involve complexity related to existing District structure

A grayscale photograph of an office environment. In the foreground, three people are gathered around a desk, looking at a tablet held by a woman. An older man and a younger man stand behind her, observing. In the background, another person is seated at a desk, working on a computer. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source coming from the computer monitors and desk lamps.

Conclusions

Summary of Recommendations

- South Platte River Corridor Plan
 - Various conditions along river. Plan recommendations are based on character zones
 - Public access and benefit along with incentive zone
- Governance
 - Identify clear long-term structure to govern SPR
 - Capital, operations, maintenance
 - Coordinates private investment

