

Downtown Denver, Colorado

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

July 17–22, 2022



 **Urban Land
Institute**
Advisory Services

COVER: A major crossing over Speer Boulevard, looking toward the Auraria Campus from downtown Denver. *(Ryan Cambridge)*

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Downtown Denver, Colorado

Reimagining Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek
to Catalyze a New Downtown for Denver

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

July 17–22, 2022



Urban Land Institute
2001 L Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-4948
uli.org

About the Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE is a global member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2022 alone, more than 2,800 events, both virtual and in person, were held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

About ULI Advisory Services

THE GOAL OF THE ULI ADVISORY SERVICES PROGRAM is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 700 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfield redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's advisory services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, participants in ULI's Advisory Services panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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Acknowledgments

*The ULI Advisory Services panel.
(Not pictured, Kelly Nagel.)*

The panel's report is a result of multiple individuals and organizations participating collectively to begin to reimagine Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard. The Advisory Services program acknowledges, with gratitude, the four partners of the panel sponsor team: the city and county of Denver, the Downtown Denver Partnership, the Auraria Higher Education Center, and the University of Colorado Denver. Their teams are listed below.

Many of these individuals provided their insight during the panel process by giving interviews, providing briefing materials, or joining the panel for a tour of the study area. All partners will be essential for advancing efforts to reimagine Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard.

Special thanks are extended to Lilly Djaniantz with the city and county of Denver (sponsor team project manager) and Annie Rose Hill with the University of Colorado Denver for producing the panel briefing materials, scheduling stakeholder interviews, and planning events. The panel would also like to thank Rodney Milton and the staff of ULI Colorado, local ULI members, and the more than 100 stakeholders who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel. ULI is grateful for the support of The JPB Foundation.



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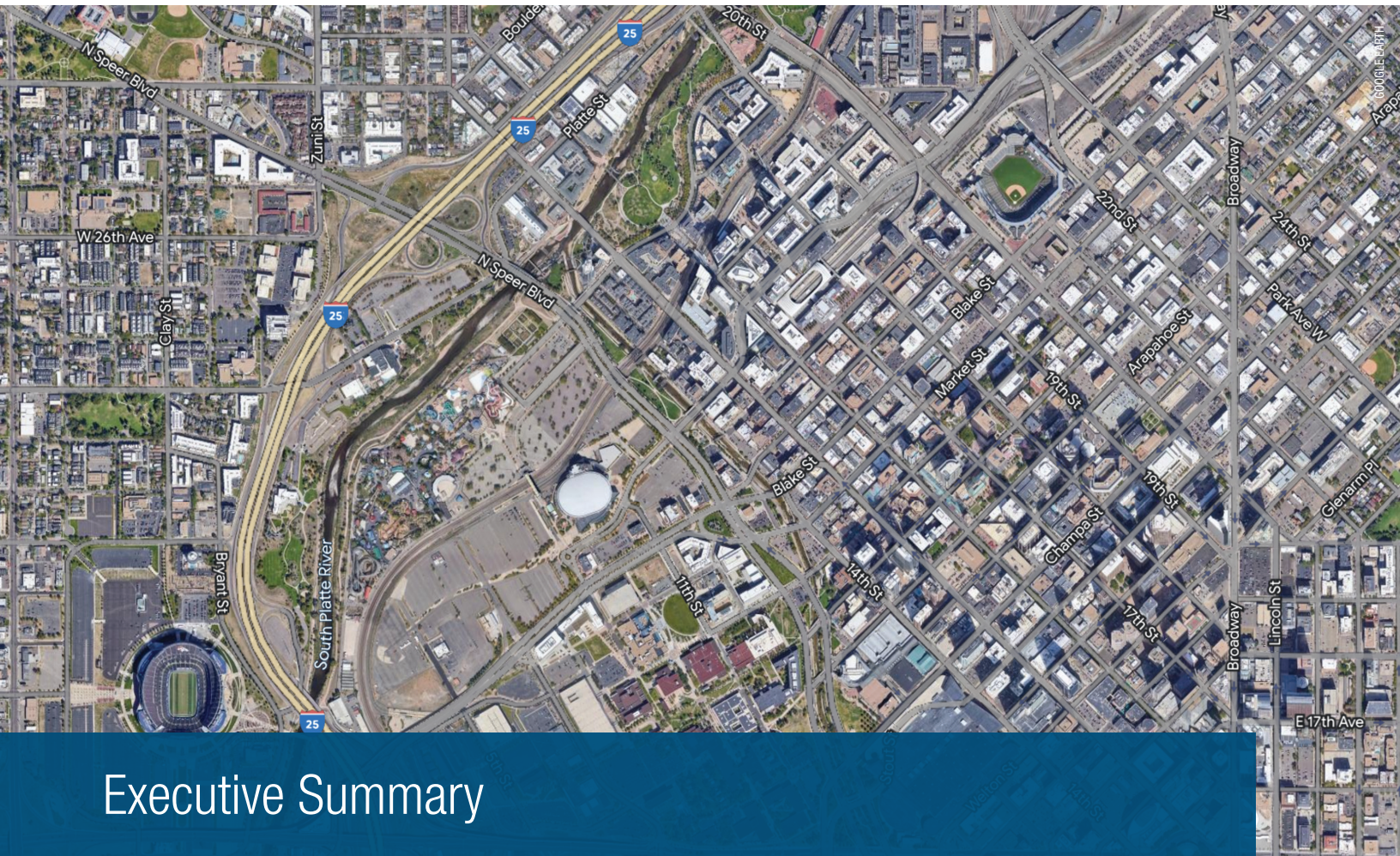
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Executive Summary

DENVER IS YOUNG IN AGE, having come into existence in 1858 as an upstart settlement at the foothills of the Rockies and along the banks of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek during the days of the gold mining rushes. The gold was quickly claimed, the gold miners moved on, but other settlers remained, and Denver grew to the vibrant modern city it is today.

Importantly, in far earlier times, these same lands were roamed by nomadic Indian tribes whose migrations covered significant distances across the American West, leaving few marks. Denver is still home to a community of descendants of these Indigenous peoples who want to continue their legacy into the future.

Today, Denver joins most cities across the United States in determining how to contend with the dynamics and outcomes of the COVID years, with social and racial stresses, changing economies, and increasing threats from climate change and environmental destruction.

As an initial step, the leaders of four civic and educational organizations—the city and county of Denver, the Downtown Denver Partnership (DDP), the Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC), and the University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver)—came together to strategize how downtown Denver and the

Auraria Campus could jointly advance Denver's economic and academic initiatives to serve the city, its educational and academic assets, and the growing metropolitan region.



The sponsor team reflects key institutions and stakeholders whose facilities are bisected by Speer Boulevard, as well as the city and county of Denver. AHEC is in Auraria, the Downtown Denver Partnership is active in the central business district, and CU Denver has campus sites in both Auraria and the central business district.

Together these leaders agreed on one initial and critical problem: that downtown Denver (to the east) and the Auraria Campus (to the west) are severed from each other by a high-speed, five-lane urban arterial named Speer Boulevard for its 1900s parkway origins, but which by the 1950s functioned more as a highway. “What if we could change that?,” the sponsors asked. “And what can we do to restore the environmental and recreational assets of the neighboring waterway, Cherry Creek?”

The four key stakeholder entities became the sponsors for a ULI Advisory Services panel to address these (and other) questions. The goal was to provide strategic and specific recommendations on how to reimagine a Speer Boulevard that (1) provides greater safety and accessibility for multiple forms of transportation, including walking and biking; (2) includes expanded opportunities for recreation and open space; and (3) extends more effective connections between downtown Denver and the Auraria Campus.

The Panel’s Recommendations

During the weeklong work of the Advisory Services panel, the breadth and depth of the scope of work was affected by the panel’s meetings and deliberations. Here are the eight major recommendations made during the panel’s presentation to the sponsors:

Vision (Longer Term)

The ULI panel strongly recommends that the leadership group take the long-term view of the elements and strategies of Denver’s next economy. Already the University of Colorado Denver has moved some of its programs into downtown facilities, and likewise, the downtown entities should be looking for sites in Auraria for tech companies and partners who want to work closely with academia. This will also have the benefit of opening more job opportunities to Denver graduates who are now being wooed away to other cities.

- Embrace the importance of the role of education as a key factor of success for Denver’s future economy, workforce, identity, and commitment to equality.
- Integrate the Auraria Campus and the downtown through lengthened crossing times for pedestrians. Transform underused parking lots into healthy, vertical campuses. Prioritize the use of bikes and walking. Add numerous parks and places to meet.



Examples of the three key areas of focus for the panel: providing greater safety and accessibility for multiple forms of transportation, expanding recreation and open-space opportunities, and effectively connecting downtown Denver and the Auraria Campus.

RYAN CAMBRIDGE

- Create mixed-use communities across the Auraria Campus, giving priority to affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and other attractors for tech and business partners. Think 18 hours a day, not just “9 to 5.”
- Connect Auraria with its origins. Prioritize inclusion of Indigenous peoples, and residents and businesses displaced throughout the area’s history.

Action (Now!)

The panel recognizes that a new mayor and a new team of leaders will be coming into place in July 2023. But that should not hold back taking on initiatives for Speer Boulevard and the east–west crossings that prioritize pedestrians and their safety.

- Explore changes to Speer Boulevard now. Intervene. Slow motorized traffic. Add dedicated bicycle lanes.
- Kick-start enhanced safety and connectivity by reconfiguring Speer Boulevard with priority for crossing pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Optimize cross connections between Auraria and downtown.
- Revitalize Cherry Creek as an improved environmental asset and recreational attraction for all Denver’s communities.

The ULI panel appreciates the sponsor team’s excellent briefing documents and intensive preparations for the panel’s site visits and community interactions. The panel urges the sponsor team members to continue their contributions and leadership in advancing the plans and projects that will attract new businesses and innovative educational enterprises for students, faculty, and industry partners in the upcoming years to lift the breadth of Denver’s economies and the quality of everyday life for all the Denver communities.



As part of their work, Advisory Services panelists walked and drove through the study area with members of the sponsor team, becoming more familiar with Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek.



Project Setting

THE FOLLOWING SECTION PROVIDES BACKGROUND on the area of focus for the panel, outlines the goals of the current efforts by the sponsor team, defines the study area for the panel, and provides an overview of key socioeconomic and market trends relevant to the panel's assignment. Much of the information included in this section is sourced from briefing materials provided to the panel by the sponsor team.

Speer Boulevard

Originally a series of footpaths along Cherry Creek, by the 1900s the road that became Speer Boulevard was a City Beautiful parkway and not the urban highway it has become today. Influenced by Mayor Robert Speer's commitment to the City Beautiful movement and the work of urban planner and landscape architect George E. Kessler, the original roadway was transformed to a boulevard along Cherry Creek and known as the American Elm Zone. An emphasis on trees, water, and mountain views was a consistent theme. It was designated a Historic Parkway in 1986. The Cherry Creek Trail, which follows Cherry Creek, ran parallel to the boulevard and often below it in places where the creek had been channelized.



Historic image of Speer Boulevard reflecting its City Beautiful parkway design.

Auraria

Three competing settlements had been established during the 1859 Gold Rush: Auraria to the west, Highland to the north, and Denver City at the confluence of the Platte River and Cherry Creek. Auraria quickly merged with Denver City, becoming what some referred to as West Denver. The neighborhood is Denver's oldest and is separated from downtown Denver by Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard. Although the neighborhood thrived for several decades, it was devastated by a flood in 1965. The state of Colorado ultimately chose to purchase and redevelop the area in the 1970s into what is now AHEC. The Auraria Campus now comprises three separate academic entities, the Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the University of Colorado Denver. The proximity of three independent higher education institutions adjacent to downtown Denver can become an exceptional asset to the city's future.

Downtown Denver

Downtown Denver, located to the east of Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek, became the city's primary commercial center. Downtown is home to art museums, historic landmarks, and major cultural attractions such as the Denver Center for Performing Arts, Colorado Convention Center, and Larimer Square. Downtown also includes the 16th Street Mall, which stretches from the State Capitol to the Denver Union Station Neighborhood.

The station underwent an extensive revitalization effort beginning in 2008, becoming the heart of a new mixed-use district well served by a light-rail station and a regional attraction, with commuter rail and bus as well as a train-to-the-plane at Denver International Airport. During this same period, demand for living in downtown grew, stimulating growth in mixed-use development; population grew from 7,578 in 2000 to 33,026 in 2022, according to Esri data presented by the DDP.

The “Next” Speer Boulevard

As stated in the briefing materials provided to the panel by the sponsor team:

“Speer Boulevard has been a critical element of Denver's downtown transportation infrastructure for over 100 years. Vehicular-oriented trips continue to rely on the strong connectivity of Speer Boulevard from Interstate 25 to Colfax Avenue, along the southwestern portion of the downtown Central Business District, to access and circulate in and around the city. While this connectivity will always remain important, new opportunities continue to emerge

along the Speer corridor, challenging the dated character of this wide boulevard. In parallel to vehicular circulation, the Cherry Creek Trail supports a bike and pedestrian network connecting communities across Denver to the South Platte River. The creek is currently nested in a concrete channel, between north and southbound traffic of Speer Blvd, but the redevelopment of Speer poses an opportunity to shift the creek back to its natural location, removing the concrete embankment and integrating the creek into open space allowing ecology and biodiversity to thrive.”

In preparation for the ULI Advisory Services panel, the sponsor team identified the following guiding principles:

- Re-envision the Speer corridor from Colfax Avenue to I-25.
- Enhance and expand multimodal movement along Speer Boulevard.
- Enhance and improve the open-space network along the Cherry Creek Trail.
- Ensure that the flood mitigation role of Cherry Creek continues and that the potential impact of development takes into account best practices concerning sustainability and resilience.
- Coordinate bike and pedestrian mobility networks along Speer Boulevard and to and through the Cherry Creek Trail.
- Seamlessly link communities across Speer Boulevard.
- Promote enhanced gateway entry sequences along Speer Boulevard.
- Coordinate an appropriate level of future development along Speer Boulevard.
- Reconfigure Speer Boulevard to reflect its City Beautiful parkway origins.
- Ensure that proposed modifications to Speer Boulevard, the open-space network, and development are financially feasible.
- Ignite innovation through technology and spaces that promote visible collaboration among students, faculty, the community, and industry.

Study Area

The sponsor team identified a focused segment of Speer Boulevard from Interstate 25 to West Colfax Avenue that includes three proposed gateways (Wewatta Street, Larimer Street, and Champa Street) for the panel's study area. The ULI panel proposed to expand its scope of work to address



The sponsor team identified a segment of Speer Boulevard for the focus of the panel, as well as proposed gateway intersections at Wewatta Street, Larimer Street, and Champa Street.

recommendations and water course changes that may be needed farther up and down stream. In addition, the panel felt that this assignment should not be solely about reimagining Speer Boulevard, but also about elevating and reimagining the Cherry Creek corridor.

Current Demographics and Market Conditions

According to the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Denver has a population of 711,463. About 69 percent of the population is white, 9 percent is Black or African American, 4 percent is Asian, and 10 percent is two or more races. About 30 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino.

Denver residents over age 25 have a high level of educational attainment, with 53 percent holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared with 34 percent for the country overall. The median household income is \$78,177. About half of all housing units are owner-occupied, and the median value of these units is \$459,100, compared with \$244,900 nationally. At about 50 percent of all housing, the rental market in Denver is large, with a median gross rent of \$1,495 per month, compared with \$1,163 per month nationally.

Three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, downtowns across the nation are experiencing several new or exacerbated issues. The issues that downtown Denver is confronting, particularly related to office vacancies, are not exclusive to this region. According to *CommercialEdge* (July 2022), “nearly two and a half years since the start of the pandemic [in 2020], the office sector continues to struggle, facing an unstable short-term outlook as it contends with record vacancy rates. However, the sector’s long-term future is also hazy as hybrid work-from-home models continue to solidify, and rising inflation rates further disincentivize workers to return to office environments.” As outlined by the sponsor team, downtown Denver is currently experiencing a higher office vacancy rate (24 percent) than the city overall (20.6 percent). In addition to office, the retail sector has experienced challenges and the vacancy rate is at 18 to 20 percent, which is also affecting the vitality of Denver’s downtown.

Office and retail vacancies are not the only challenge facing downtown Denver. As in many other American cities, such as Seattle, Portland, Houston, and Phoenix, the homeless population has become an increasing challenge for Denver, particularly in downtown. In addition, transportation system budgets are strained, given reduced ridership. Both issues affect retail, housing, and office markets.

The Panel's Assignment

THE SPONSOR TEAM ASKED ULI TO CONVENE AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL to provide a strategic reimagining of Speer Boulevard as an urban arterial that provides greater safety and accessibility for people using multiple forms of transportation, including walking and biking; provides expanded opportunities for recreation and open space along the Cherry Creek Trail; and better connects downtown Denver and the Auraria Campus.

The panel was asked by the sponsor team to address the following specific items:

- Review the proposed solution for Speer Boulevard provided in the briefing book, and confirm, identify improvements, or propose a new solution for reimagining Speer Boulevard.
- Propose building development forms and typology along Speer Boulevard.
- Provide strategies for improving open space along Cherry Creek.
- Provide strategies for developing a thriving urban edge along Speer Boulevard for AHEC, which houses three academic institutions including CU Denver.
- Propose program management and financing options.

Although a ULI Advisory Services panel lasts a brief five days, an important part of the panel process is hearing from a wide range of stakeholders who might affect or be impacted by the topic addressed by ULI. Panel members spoke with more than 100 individuals. The 11 "key takeaways" from those conversations are as follows:

- Create a living urban campus.
- Leave a 21st-century legacy.
- Compete on the global stage.
- Cherry Creek is a jewel/Cherry Creek is dangerous.
- "I work next to Speer Boulevard, but I've never crossed it."
- The Cherry Creek corridor is a valuable but underleveraged asset that must be capitalized on.

- Green spaces must yield multiple community benefits: economic development, green infrastructure, resilience, and others.
- High-quality parks and green spaces are critical to the future success of downtown.
- This is a chance for Denver to do something special with the Cherry Creek corridor and adjacent parks.
- Use water to bring people together.
- Be bold!

The report that follows takes into consideration all that was learned from the sponsor team and stakeholders to enable the panel to propose recommendations on the reimagining of Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard. In addition, the panel has broadened its findings to include recommendations about the visions and strategies for more strongly linking downtown and the Auraria Campus. This discussion begins with this larger field of challenges.



Connecting Higher Education with Downtown

THE ISSUES CURRENTLY AFFECTING HIGHER EDUCATION in downtown Denver parallel those challenging downtowns across the country: they are the result of long-term trends combined with recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, that can no longer be ignored.

Specifically, these include the following:

- Shifting demographics, student profiles, levels of affordability, and metrics for success;
- Institutional challenges and financial models that no longer reflect new realities or opportunities;
- Combinations of place-based and digital delivery;
- Research leading to intellectual property transfer to economic benefit;
- Partnerships with the private sector, other institutions, and municipal government; and
- Diversifying income streams through real estate and collaboration with the private sector.

It is the panel's perspective that two specific and pressing challenges facing higher education institutions and downtowns both relate directly to the recent disruptions in work and life caused by the pandemic and its aftermath. Just as workers are not coming into the office as frequently because they can work from home, students are not attending classes on campus as often because of the expansion of virtual learning platforms and hybrid classes. Housing affordability, an issue facing urban areas nationwide, also presents a challenge to students who seek to attend universities and wish to live on or near campuses located in urban areas. Building a sense of community and place shared by students, faculty, and community is difficult to achieve when a campus is only open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Reflecting on these challenges, the panel believes that the higher education institutions located in and near downtown Denver have several opportunities. Emphasizing lifelong learning and

upskilling is a must. Individuals are no longer attending college in their early 20s and never returning. For an individual to persist in his or her career, particularly with rapid technological changes, attending classes or training at many points throughout a career or life is necessary. The panel has observed that a notable asset for AHEC is in offering a wide range of courses to meet the needs of students throughout their life and career.

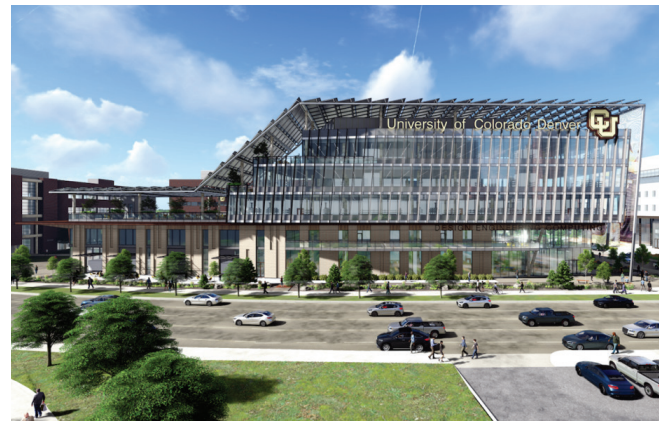
The panel also recommends that the sponsor team consider new or expanded offerings and credentials outside conventional degree programs. In addition, further developing and enhancing collaborations with private-sector entities can create a mutually beneficial partnership to upskill employees and train the upcoming workforce to meet new and changing career demands.

Another key element is understanding the profile of the current student body and meeting the financial needs of these students. To describe this, the panel uses recent efforts by CU Denver as an example.

Based on information available on the number of Pell Grant recipients (federal, need-based grants to low-income, primarily undergraduate students) and graduation rates for regional-scale universities such as CU Denver, a negative correlation exists between the percentage of the student body that receives need-based financial assistance and the rate of completing a degree program in six years. In other words, as the percentage

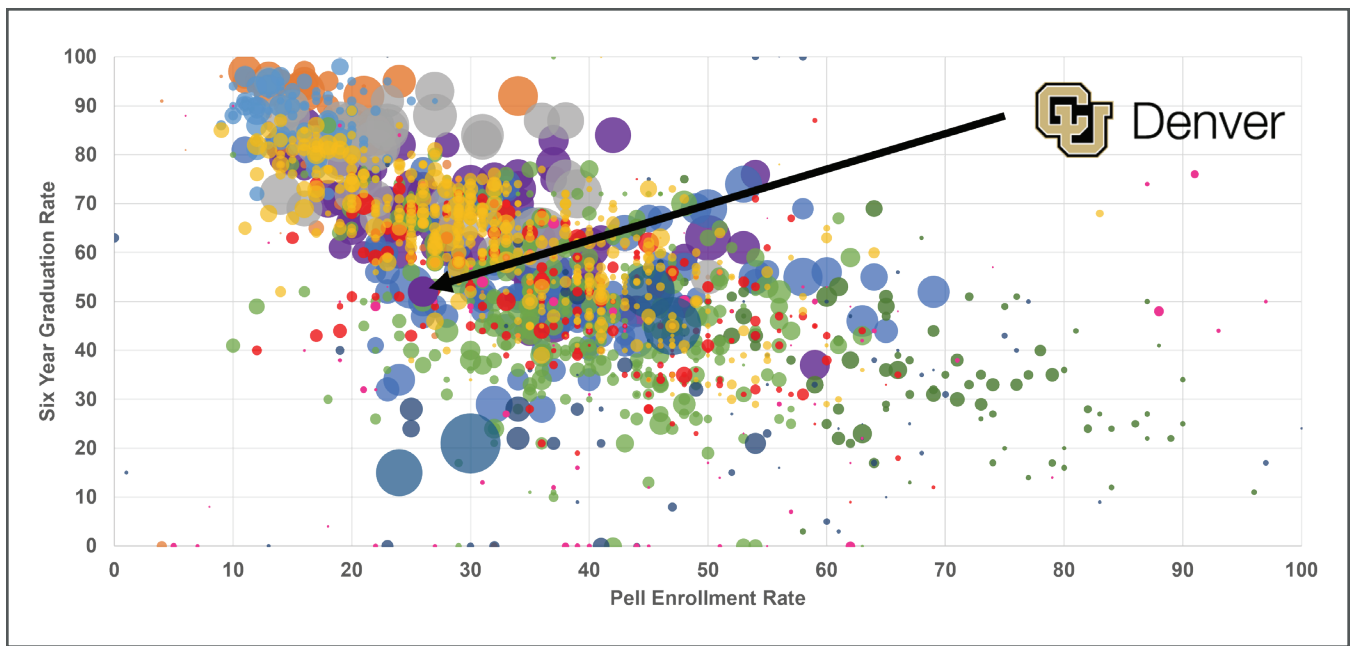
of students receiving need-based financial aid increases, the rate of completing a degree program in six years decreases. Between 25 and 30 percent of CU Denver's student body receives Pell Grants, and about 50 percent of students graduate in six years.

The investment CU Denver is making in the new building for the College of Engineering, Design and Computing on the Auraria Campus is an example of a strategic decision for the university and its students. It demonstrates that CU Denver knows its student body and is focused on its success, which includes providing access to degree programs in fields that offer high job satisfaction and earnings potential, such as engineering.



Rendering of concept for new CU Denver building to house the Department of Engineering on the Auraria Campus adjacent to Speer Boulevard.

CU DENVER



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, ULI

As illustrated in this chart, the greater the number of students receiving need-based financial aid, the lower the rate of completing a degree program in six years. About 25 to 30 percent of CU Denver students receive Pell Grants, and about 50 percent of students graduate in six years.

Building an Education Ecosystem

Many examples of urban campuses across the United States demonstrate the integration of a higher education institution into the urban fabric of a downtown and the creation of an education ecosystem. In the best circumstances, cities and educational institutions recognize that their fortunes are tethered, and they seek to find optimal working arrangements and proactive planning. Yes, the issue of campus expansion can produce friction between permanent residents, businesses, and university growth. However, urban campuses are becoming more attractive and desirable to prospective students, and thus the blurring of the distinction between the city and the campus is highly desirable (think of New York University as an example).

Colorado and Denver are already attractive destinations; thus integrating a great educational enterprise within the premier urban destination is not only obvious but essential. This region also hosts a large and vital entrepreneurial and venture capital ecosystem. One regional higher education institution, CU Boulder, illustrates the benefits of this integration of a destination and an educational enterprise.

For Denver, both the city and the DDP, three areas of engagement need to be considered on their own as well as with respect for one another when developing an education ecosystem.

- **Urban and downtown issues:** The panel believes that it is important the sponsors not lose focus on the existing urban core. Union Station and the many subsequent development projects around it, as well as development of other areas

of the city, remain a priority. How to accelerate the reemergence of the heart of the city must be a consideration. This includes addressing economic development, social services, and tourism, among other issues.

- **Education and the Auraria Campus:** Great cities invariably have a strong higher education component proximate to the businesses, entrepreneurs, and capital that help drive innovation. The panel believes that the future of Denver necessitates more investment in the institutions on the Auraria Campus as well as in the campus itself.
- **Future development and the economy:** Denver will inevitably experience growth; as evidenced by several proposed projects, including the River Mile, the Ball Arena area, and Empower Field, upward of 25,000 new residents can be anticipated. Therefore, the panel recommends that the sponsors consider thoughtful integration and mutually supportive agendas as projects move from proposal to development.

For AHEC and the three institutions that make up the Auraria Campus, the panel recommends that they go a step further and leverage this premier urban setting in the state. The panel recommends that these institutions consider the following: University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and Community College of Denver have their respective missions, aspirations, identities, and—in some cases—systemwide imperatives that need to be respected and supported. To achieve those ends, they need to be seeking required resources as they see fit. However, the panel believes that their collective futures are united, to some extent, by the Auraria Campus real estate and its potential to contribute to the missions and agendas of all institutions.

AURARIA CAMPUS ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Community College of Denver (CCD)

Fully accredited two-year college; one of the most diverse colleges in Colorado, with 8,000 enrolled

Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver)

Founded in 1963; MSU offers more than 200 majors, minors, certificates, and graduate programs with a total undergraduate enrollment topping 18,000

University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver)

Founded in 1973; 15,000-plus students; 110 undergraduate and graduate degree programs; more than 30 online degree programs and certificate and nondegree options

Auraria Campus Real Estate Strategy

Rather than a place apart from the downtown area, both in perception and reality, the Auraria Campus needs to be considered as an integral part of the city. Moreover, this 150-acre asset can and must be leveraged to benefit all parties—especially the institutions on the campus. This requires a very different mindset, a confirmation of cooperation among the stakeholders, a renewed relationship with the city, and the capacity to achieve an ambitious vision—one still in a state of becoming.

The panel noted the extent of available land on the west side of Speer Boulevard adjacent to the existing and planned campuses, which is an exceptional asset. The blending of students, staff,

administrators, and industry partners can generate an education-based community that also welcomes businesses and entities and broadens the access to primary and secondary schools in a mixed-use neighborhood—one that will have excellent transit service as well as ample parks and open spaces.

The opportunity exists to reposition AHEC not simply as a service provider for the Auraria Campus but also as a real estate arm. By building professional real estate development capacity within AHEC and/or attached to it, the panel believes that the campus can be uniquely positioned to integrate urban uses into the campus that make it more attractive but with a financial motive in mind—all of which is directed at the future of education on the campus and Denver economic development.

The panel acknowledges that the campus hosts three powerful higher education institutions in a single location. They all have separate agendas. The panel believes that this recommendation should not limit the pursuit of those separate agendas, which reflect each institution's individual mission. However, as the current leadership demonstrates, great work can be done together. The panel urges the sponsor team to take that into consideration when developing a real estate strategy for AHEC.

Based on the panel's perspective as an independent and outside group of experts, the opportunity exists to view the campus not just for its value as a provider of education, but also in monetary terms that can be turned into resources for a purpose: great education for students and student success. The panel recommends that the sponsor consider how it might take the asset it has (regardless of whether it is owned by the state or not) and turn it into something more. One of the benefits of doing so is in large-scale projects like innovation districts, which require three key elements: economic assets, physical assets, and network (financial) assets.

Whether pursuing an innovation district or other development along Speer Boulevard, the panel also recommends considering a public/private partnership (PPP) structure for development projects. A PPP allows a public-sector owner of land to work with private-sector developers to build the improvements, or physical structures. A private-sector developer can manage the design, construction, financing, and long-term operations in accordance with agreed upon standards and guidelines outlined in the partnership. In the long term, the multiple sources of funding for a PPP project can also support a program management office, which can play a critical role in the ongoing success of a multi-use development. In addition, the panel notes that market conditions and the economy will help dictate the appetite of the private sector's involvement and the speed at which investment will occur.

BENEFITS OF PROXIMITY FOR AN INNOVATION DISTRICT

It is the panel's understanding that CU Denver is considering an Innovation District within the study area. To increase the potential success of such a district, the panel believes proximity among institutions and other urban assets can provide the following benefits when pursuing a project of this type:

- University research funding by large external grants (National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, among others) for topics and industries reflective of the region;
- A highly functional intellectual property transfer system that attracts capital and helps launch new businesses;
- Partnerships with development partners who can provide lab spaces for innovation companies as well as provide support for a larger entrepreneurial community;
- An engaged business community and startup ecosystem, the latter of which already exists in the Denver/Boulder region; and
- Opportunities to attract affordable and attainable housing within the Auraria Campus.

At a higher level, the panel recommends that AHEC think strategically about its real estate and recommends and supports the following actions to lay the groundwork for success:

- Add real estate responsibilities to the existing state entity (AHEC).
- Manage the land and master plan the campus.
- Engage private developers and negotiate on behalf of the campus.
- Unlock full value and potential of Auraria Campus and Speer Boulevard.
- Use Speer Boulevard as a physical connection between downtown and Auraria Campus.
- Collaborate with stakeholders (public and private) to set a unified vision for a reimagined campus.

EXAMPLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM PROJECTS



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

The ASU SkySong Scottsdale Innovation Center.



BILL TIMMERMAN

The 850 PBC laboratory building, a public/private partnership between Arizona State University, the city of Phoenix, and Wexford Science & Technology.

SkySong, the ASU Scottsdale Innovation Center

- 1.2 million-square-foot mixed-use innovation center development
- 42-acre campus in Scottsdale, Arizona
- \$80 million infrastructure investment by city of Scottsdale
- University Realty as a financial development partner with Plaza Companies and city of Scottsdale
- ASU Real Estate Development leases space for university needs (lessee)

Mirabella at ASU Lifelong Learning Center

- \$252 million, 613,000-square-foot community with 250 independent-living residences, assisted living, and memory support programs and a skilled nursing and rehabilitation center
- University Realty as financial development partner with Pacific Retirement Services
 - ASU Real Estate Development as university transactional entity and negotiated ground lease of university property
 - Additional rent payment collection from developer

850 PBC, Public/Private Partnership “Spec” Laboratory Building

- Project with Wexford Science & Technology
- 227,000-square-foot multitenant biomedical research center
- Arizona State University (ASU) as a partner with the city of Phoenix—intergovernmental agreement to develop seven acres of the Phoenix Bioscience Core
 - ASU Real Estate Development as ground lessor to Wexford Science & Technology, negotiated ground lease
 - Additional rent collection from developer
 - Negotiated lab space leases for ASU

Signal the Future of the Education Ecosystem: Larimer Street and Speer Boulevard

Reimagining Speer Boulevard and an urban higher education ecosystem is a process. The work already completed by the sponsor team and convening this panel are first steps. Showing progress to the community, students, and downtown businesses will be critical to help build and maintain momentum.

The panel recommends continuing to focus on the Larimer Street crossing over Speer Boulevard as a physical way to signal that the sponsor team is moving forward. The panel recommends continuing work already underway to make this key intersection a more pedestrian-friendly and inviting crossing to and from the Auraria Campus and downtown Denver. The panel also recommends adding iconic pieces of public art to represent the connection between these two areas. As with *SkySong* on the University of Arizona's Tempe campus, a public art installation can be multifunctional, providing something aesthetically pleasing while also providing pedestrian amenities such as shade, cover in inclement weather, or lighting.

Another successful project is the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway in Boston, officially opened in 2008. It is sited at street level, connecting the Boston Harbor to the city. This 17-acre project that includes a one-acre linear park contains design elements drawn from Asian traditions and artwork of Boston's Asian communities—an example for the Indigenous peoples of Denver.



An example of public art in an ASU development.

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



This public art installation at the heart of SkySong offers an iconic gateway to the Scottsdale Innovation Center and shade during full-sun days.

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY



The Public Realm and a Mixed-Use, Walkable Community

DENVER'S POPULATION IS GROWING by 35,000 annually, with the greatest growth among those 25 to 34 years old. An Auraria Campus that is integrated into the urban core of Denver by becoming a mixed-use urban area can be supported by this growth.

To make this happen, the panel recommends that the sponsor team develop a framework for action, led by the public realm and public spaces, that builds on the legacy of Denver's core area and its vibrant mix of uses to create an urban environment for the 150-acre campus and transform it into a mixed-use community with strong connections to downtown Denver. An emphasis on convenient walkability, frequent transit, and priority for bicycling is essential to achieve a "great neighborhood" goal. This framework can kick-start a series of transportation investments that puts Denver Auraria on the global stage.

Setting the Scene

According to a June 2021 article in *Business Wire*, Denver is among the top three most expensive U.S. metro areas in which to own a car. In 2020 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that Denver households spent over 17 percent of after-tax income

on automobile transportation, costing a total of \$3.7 billion in a year. In addition, Denver households spent over 34 percent of after-tax income on housing.

Denver is also one of the fastest-growing cities for entrepreneurs and ranks first for population gain in the 25-to-34-year age group. As noted in an October 2014 *Denver Post* article ("Why Millennials Don't Drive So Much"), this age group chooses to live in urban walkable communities without owning a car. In addition, top location factors for entrepreneurs and global startups include convenient access to rapid transit, low cost of living that enables employees to put down roots, high quality of life for living and working, vibrant cultural life that attracts intellectuals, strong community and technology infrastructure support, and easy access to talent through research universities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 data show that Denver has a 12 percent poverty rate, and in 2020, 12 percent of the

population under 65 years of age was without health insurance. The panel believes that Denver can address affordability in the city by increasing equitable access to technology, housing, and health, social, and educational resources, without relying on automobile travel. Creating a “15-minute city” where residents and businesses have walkable access to daily needs in high-density, mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhoods, can significantly improve affordability and position Denver as a top city for entrepreneurs and families.

Creating a 21st-Century Sustainable, Connected, Walkable, Global City

Denver has the opportunity to become such a city, and the Auraria Campus is an unparalleled place to start. AHEC is the largest collective college campus in Colorado with 150 acres of land located within walking distance from downtown Denver. Despite being directly served by three light-rail transit (LRT) stations, the campus is configured as a commuter campus emphasizing parking structures, which can undermine the operational efficiency of on-site facilities, negatively affect student enrollment, and reduce the campus experience for faculty and students. In 2022, AHEC repositioned its strategic focus to create a connected, living urban campus that prioritizes walkable, complete communities to enable living on campus for the 38,000 students and 5,000 faculty staff and further attract global talents and build research partnerships with entrepreneurs and tech companies.

In 2019, the city of Denver established clear policies and goals to make the shift to create walkable, transit-friendly communities, reduce the number of people driving, and improve community health and environmental outcomes through *Blueprint Denver*. In addition, new developments are required to create and monitor a transportation demand management plan as well as implement a range of infrastructure, services, and programmatic tools such as reducing parking, providing transit passes, providing on-site child care, and meeting first- and last-mile needs through off-site active transportation assistance.

In 2022, despite the shift of one-third of downtown workers to working from home, which resulted in increases in office vacancy, downtown Denver is home to more than 135,000 jobs and 33,000 residents with over two of every five workers traveling to downtown by transit. Transforming this “four jobs to one resident” downtown to a “four jobs to four residents” live-in downtown with walkable, family-oriented amenities is vital to sustain a critical mass of around-the-clock foot traffic and to increase downtown housing to attract technology-based talent.

The panel recommends that one way to catalyze this shift is by expanding the urban environment of downtown into the 150 acres of Auraria, making both downtown and Auraria livable by

- Adding family-oriented facilities and housing across both areas, supported by daily walkable access to daycare, recreation, and healthy food;
- Providing programmable social spaces and broadband internet connections to attract talents and create innovation and a knowledge-based economy; and
- Converting existing buildings and parking facilities into housing and family-oriented amenities.

This repositioning provides a unique opportunity for Denver to be a leader in sustainable planning, design, and city-building for the 21st century.

Creating High-Density, Mixed-Use, Transit-Oriented Communities at Stations

The Denver metropolitan area is served by the Regional Transportation District (RTD), which was created in 1969 to develop, operate, and maintain a mass transportation system for the benefit of over 3 million people in the RTD’s service area. In 2009, the RTD made a historic investment of \$2.2 billion in rail infrastructure to improve connectivity with the University of Colorado, adding to the Central Corridor network that serves the Auraria Campus with three LRT stations.

RTD’s first light-rail line, the Central Corridor, carries over 16,000 passengers per weekday, with trains arriving every three to 15 minutes. About 80 percent of the Auraria Campus area is within a five-minute walk of a station. Despite ridership decreasing because of the pandemic, this existing infrastructure has the potential to be the catalyst to attract high-density developments and business partners to locate on the Auraria Campus. Convenient access to transit stations that are full service and include community uses is the top factor for investment, relocation, and long-term tenancy for office and research and development uses.

Currently, most students arrive at the LRT station near Colfax Avenue and Speer Boulevard. It is critical for future development within the campus to provide students, residents, and businesses with walkable access to comprehensive uses including retail, office, local amenities, art and culture, and hospitality and community amenities. Doing so will significantly reduce the number of automobile trips required to meet daily needs.



Three light-rail stations are close to the Auraria Campus, though the panel understands that students most often use the station at Colfax Avenue and Speer Boulevard.

Critical to the success of this effort early on, the panel recommends that the sponsor seek to invest in high-density, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development around the existing light-rail stations. In addition, the panel recommends that the sponsors focus on including a variety of vibrant mixed uses on the ground floor of these developments. Key to the vibrancy of the stations will be providing a sense of place through cultural spaces that are authentic to the area, community spaces that quickly create a draw, and destinations that blur the line between the 150 acres and the surrounding area, in addition to providing restaurants, office, and retail uses.

Following is an example of a mix of uses for a holistic ground-floor design to facilitate a walkable and vibrant neighborhood:

- 50 percent of land for public uses—streets and public spaces;
- 25 percent of the ground floor for local retail uses—small enterprises and pop-ups;
- 25 percent of the ground floor for local amenity uses—co-working space, laundry, health and wellness;
- 25 percent of the ground floor for community uses—library, learning and training, child care, social and hubs;
- 25 percent of the ground floor for culture, art, and hospitality uses—gallery, performance, culinary; and
- Atriums designed for academy and community functions to accompany pop-up uses such as informal arts performances.

Creating Interconnected Main Streets and Urban Spaces

Integrating the public realm into the planning efforts for the Auraria Campus is key to creating interconnected main streets and urban spaces that will help link the campus and downtown. The panel is aware that AHEC is in the process of developing a master plan for the campus. The panel recommends that the sponsor kick-start the master-planning process for the Auraria Campus with a public realm plan.

The purpose of this plan is to focus on extending the downtown fine-grain street and mixed-use block patterns into the campus and developing a plan that focuses on transforming strategic streets and parcels into main streets and urban spaces. Ideally, people will not need to remember the names of these streets, but rather have an image of the spaces and where they want to go. Feedback from stakeholders indicated that even with the existing public realm infrastructure, the Auraria Campus lacks pedestrian-oriented and urban experiences. The panel observed that the campus has currently underused land, including areas taken over by vehicular traffic with a redundancy of automobile infrastructure in some areas and a lack of programmable space in others.

The panel recommends that the sponsor develop a public realm plan that focuses on co-benefits, integration with the surrounding context, and offering key elements that include the following:

- **Active mobility:** Optimizing the performance of rapid-transit stations;
- **Culture:** Restoring historic and cultural fabric;
- **Socioeconomic:** Integrating the living campus with surrounding neighborhoods; and
- **Sustainability:** Transforming parking facilities into walkable precincts.

West Colfax Avenue is currently providing a “main street” function, with commercial, residential, and recreational uses on both sides. Over the past years, numerous fatal traffic crashes on West Colfax have resulted in lost lives and injuries. Furthermore, stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding the current physical condition of the light-rail station area with respect to pedestrian safety because of high vehicular volume and speed, crime caused by lack of eyes on the street, and insufficient placemaking due to the lack of critical amenities such as restroom facilities, streetscaping, and public space.

With the anticipated redevelopment of the Ball Arena area, Auraria Parkway will likely also serve a main street function. That makes it all the more important to prioritize use of transit, closing of streets, upfront bicycle parking, and walking on car-free paths. The panel also recommends that the sponsors update the road characterization of West Colfax Avenue and Auraria Parkway and transform them into vibrant, family-oriented, complete main streets, with protected child-friendly walking and cycling facilities.

For the Auraria Campus as a whole, the panel recommends the following key public realm improvements:

- Child-friendly, protected cycling facilities to enable the entire family to use cycling as their top choice for getting around the neighborhood;
- Double row of trees with seating to provide shade and seasonal interests for social functions;
- Planting beds for mitigating heat and noise;
- Seamless paving treatment from building face to curb to provide a common district identity; and
- Active ground-floor design for indoor uses to spill outside to provide eyes on the street.

The panel also recommends that the sponsors take steps to encourage people to make walking and cycling their top choice for transportation. The Auraria Campus does not exist as an island but is surrounded by an existing community, with amenities and community uses such as an early learning center located on the campus. The panel recommends that the sponsor team show immediate progress by facilitating pedestrian and bicycle access to these facilities and encouraging more families with children to come into the campus.

To better align transit-oriented land use and enable high-quality urban mixed-use development, the City of Denver’s 2002 *Blueprint Denver* street type map (updated in 2019) identified



As indicated in yellow, the public realm is a notable part of the Auraria Campus. The panel recommends developing a public realm plan for the campus that strategically transforms main streets and urban spaces within Auraria and between Auraria and downtown Denver.



YVONNE YEUNG

An example of the type of public realm improvements recommended by the panel to encourage walking, bicycling, and street-level activation.

West Colfax Avenue, Auraria Parkway, and Speer Boulevard as downtown two-way arterials. In accordance with Denver’s *Complete Streets Design Guidelines*, downtown two-way arterials are to be designed to prioritize access for people, activation, greening, and access for commerce within the curb space. The panel notes that updating these three streets in the upcoming

years will not only help achieve the city’s Vision Zero goal by 2030 but also unlock outdoor programmable space and the high-density mixed-use development that is already happening along these urban main streets.

COMMUNITY HUBS: DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Denver has a legacy of building community hubs with a focus on youth and family. Currently, Denver Public Schools is partnering with the city of Denver and community organizations to set up community hubs in six public schools. Using a two-generation approach (2Gen), the program is intended to

- Provide equitable access to opportunities, create a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity;
- Provide lifelong learning from early childhood education to K–12, postsecondary, and employment pathways;
- Build social capital and strengthen physical and mental health; and
- Provide access to economic assets, including housing, financial capacity, and transportation.

Creating Multi-Use, Inclusive Community Hubs and Anchors

The panel believes that through the Auraria Campus the sponsor can create an ecosystem that develops a competitive workforce, starting at age zero. In addition, the campus already has tremendous assets. Stakeholders expressed the desire to optimize these existing facilities as a local destination, attracting the community onto the campus. The campus also has a new wellness center fronting Speer Boulevard, as well as the historic Tivoli, places of worship, and an early childhood learning center.

Currently, the campus has several well-located community-related facilities with the opportunity to add programs and expand operating hours to activate the area during the evenings and on the weekends. The following table summarizes the current level of facility use.

The panel believes an opportunity exists to create walk-to and cycle-to multi-use community hubs on the Auraria Campus, with additional programs that reflect the unique offerings of AHEC based on a wellness-for-all framework that focuses on lifelong learning. Key elements of this approach include designing curriculum to respond to the learning needs of various ages, as discussed earlier, and building global competencies or leveraging

Current Facility Use and Operating Hours

Use	Facility and capacity	Monday to Friday	Saturday and Sunday
Spiritual	Saint Elizabeth of Hungary Catholic Church (note: privately owned and operated)	8 a.m. to 2 p.m. 30 hours	
Daycare	Auraria Early Learning Center	8 a.m. to 6 p.m. 50 hours	
Health	Health Center at Auraria	8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 45 hours	
Social and food	Tivoli Student Union	8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 45 hours	8 a.m. to 3 p.m. 14 hours
Library and media	Auraria Campus Library and Media Center	7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. 57.5 hours	9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 16 hours
Events	St. Cajetan's Conference Center (325 people), Event Center (2,700 people), and Tivoli Student Union (700 people)	On demand	On demand
Wellness	CU Denver Lola and Rob Salazar Student Wellness Center	6 a.m. to 7 p.m. 65 hours	9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 16 hours
Common	CU Denver Student Commons Building	6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. 67.5 hours	Card access
Business	CU Denver Business School	7 a.m. to 9 p.m. 70 hours	7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. 19 hours
Arts	Auraria Campus Arts Building	7 a.m. to 9 p.m. 70 hours	9 a.m. to 6 p.m. 18 hours
Arts	King Center	7 a.m. to 10 p.m. (M–W) 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (Th–F) 91.5 hours	8:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. (Sat) 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. (Sun) 27.5 hours
Hospitality	MSU Denver Hospitality Learning Center	7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. 47.5 hours	Card access
Science	Science Building	7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. 70 hours	7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. 21 hours
Academic	Academic classes within various buildings. Lifelong learning program available for seniors. (14 buildings)	8 a.m. to 10 p.m. 980 hours	8 a.m. to 6 p.m. 280 hours
Aerospace	MSU Denver Aviation and Aerospace Science Department	9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. 47.5 hours	Card access
Total	26 buildings (plus event venue)	1,736.5 hours 56% capacity	411.5 hours 33% capacity

HUB PROGRAMS AND USES

Examples of uses and programs that could be incorporated into the campus through hubs include the following:

Health and Social Hub

- Health clinics
- Agency space
- Exhibition venues
- Meeting rooms

Library and Education Hub

- Elementary school
- Daycare
- Library
- Study space

Recreation and Food Hub

- Community kitchen
- Culinary pop-ups
- Gymnasium
- Dance studios
- Lounge and events

Arts, Culture, and Design Hub

- Performance space
- Exhibition venue
- City design center
- Cultural workshop
- Agencies showroom

Technology and Innovation Hub

- Lecture hall and events
- Co-working space
- Startups and accelerators
- Mentoring space

Green and Ecology Hub

- Urban agriculture
- Eco-learning garden
- Outdoor fitness
- Green energy connections

the strength of Denver's ethnic and skills diversity to create hands-on, co-op and cross-generational collaboration and knowledge-transfer opportunities.

The institutions have introduced the concept of lifelong learning to the community through academic programs for seniors. The campus currently has a rich variety of skills-advancement facilities, ranging from hospitality to business, aerospace, arts, media, and wellness. Some of these facilities are open in the evening and on weekends. This is an opportunity to extend the operating hours to optimize facility function to support a live-in campus with around-the-clock activities. In addition, the campus has at least three venues that can accommodate events for 300 to 2,700 people, as well as health and wellness facilities that can serve the community. A great opportunity exists to mix these programs under one roof, to optimize the hands-on experience for building global competence.

Transforming Parking Lots into Healthy, Vertical Campuses

Recognizing that parking is a revenue source for AHEC, the panel believes that the shift from a commuter campus to a live-in campus will reduce the need for on-site parking facilities on the Auraria Campus overall and unlock that developable land for higher and better uses that can potentially increase both capital and operational value. Denver has a legacy of creating high-quality, vibrant, vertical mixed-use development. The city's 2010 Denver Zoning Code calls for development along transit corridors to enhance their function as mixed-use, walkable centers that serve surrounding residential neighborhoods. The panel recommends that this approach set the foundation for transforming the six parking lots into mixed-use vertical campuses.

A clear partnership framework, with a three-tier system, can orchestrate the opportunities for time and space sharing and facilitate an efficient vertical campus. The lower levels can focus on institutions. This will provide broader opportunities for joint uses and build momentum for lifelong learning. The middle portion can be the partnership floor, to accommodate uses such as laboratories, businesses, and offices. This will create a reason for people to come to this block at different times of the day, the week, and throughout the year. The top portion can be housing to sustain a critical mass of activities within the same block. Housing should not be just focused on one-bedroom or coliving for the students, but also provide family-oriented living spaces for faculty members and their families.



The panel identified several potential community hub locations (highlighted in blue) near existing facilities that could become the focus for multiple uses and extended-hours programming to bring the community onto the campus.



The Auraria Campus has several surface parking lots (highlighted in red) that the panel recommends considering for vertical, mixed-use development.

The goal is to make the vertical campus a place of choice for families of various sizes to locate in the area. The panel also recommends working to eliminate the need for parking early on, which can be an incentive to make the shift toward investing in family-size dwellings.

Key considerations for the implementation of projects at these locations should include the following:

- Optimize verticality to create demand at different times.
 - Provide vibrant amenity and labs on the ground floor.
 - Provide office and partnership uses on lower floors.
 - Provide a variety of housing with height opportunities on upper floors.
- Create 24/7 destinations—framework for time and space share.
 - Provide access to facilities covering Health and Wellness.
 - Provide access to facilities covering Arts and Culture.
 - Provide access to facilities covering Food and Culinary.
- Remove competing interests.
 - Phase out parking facilities over time.
 - Require development to fund transit passes for occupants and provide bike-storage facilities.
- Provide world-class vertical-city experience to compete at global stage.
 - Provide views of downtown and natural features.
 - Provide food and sporting, art/performance, knowledge exchange convention.

In addition, technology and innovation companies are frequently interested in an urban campus ecosystem and looking to invest in developments that elevate the quality of live/work/learn/play to attract and retain talents. Developments that incorporate sustainability, wellness, and vibrant public space are their top choice for relocation or investments. The panel also recommends incorporating mass timber and biophilia in facilities design, which can help differentiate these projects to attract talent, partnerships, and investments.

Bringing Natural Assets to the Auraria Campus

Denver's lack of urban green space and tree canopy is accelerating the heat island effect in downtown and the Auraria Campus area. According to a 2021 article published in the *Denver Post*, on average, Denver gets more than 300 days of sunshine a year, but its urban tree canopy cover is one of the lowest among major metropolitan areas in the nation. In 2014, the Nature Conservancy reported downtown Denver and Auraria Campus have only a 4 to 5 percent urban tree cover and are significantly affected by urban heat island effect.

The panel recommends that the sponsors make efforts to bring the surrounding natural assets into the Auraria Campus. The current campus is already surrounded by river and creek, and additional opportunities exist to be intentional about creating creek-to-creek connections to address flooding and provide shade early on to set up the living campus environment. These efforts will not only help mitigate the heat island and flooding challenges posed by an urban environment but can also attract business and students seeking a healthy lifestyle.

Using Tools to Facilitate and Sustain Collaboration

The panel applauds Denver's sustainability-focused efforts, including achieving a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum citywide certification in 2019 and ongoing efforts to reach net zero energy by 2025. During the panel engagement, the panel also observed the momentum and excitement of the sponsor team and stakeholders when people come together to discuss visions for the city. With large-scale efforts such as citywide sustainability initiatives and projects such the Auraria Campus and the Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard corridor, tracking and coordination efforts in a proactive manner can be beneficial.

The panel believes an opportunity exists to turn the physical model into a living digital model or digital twin using 3D visualization, so that everybody can see what is happening on the ground and what impact different planning and development project may have on the city. The panel recommends that the sponsor develop a digital model of key geographic areas of focus. For example, the panel learned that Denver has a legacy of sustainability.

POTENTIAL USES OF A DIGITAL MODEL

- Development Review
 - **Accelerate effective decision-making:** enable city departments to review multiple development proposals concurrently at both site and neighborhood scale;
 - **Leverage developments to improve neighborhoods:** identify both on-site and off-site improvements, such as increasing at-grade outdoor share-space, improving public realm and streetscapes, meeting sustainability targets, and improving stormwater management performance; and
 - **Facilitate effective collaboration:** use the common platform to enable developers and their consultants to think beyond contract lines, test solutions, and improve integration of their proposal with the existing neighborhood.
- Mixed Use
 - **Improve walkability:** enable coordination of active ground-floor uses among various developments and the surrounding neighborhood; and
 - **Improve the mix of live/work/learn/play:** better coordinate vertical mixed use to improve synergies.
- Public Realm
 - **Improve network coordination:** enable effective resource allocation to deliver seamless high-quality walking and cycling experience; and
 - **Improve street-level experience:** enable coordination of street furniture, paving, tree planting, green-street technology, night-time and seasonal uses.
- Phasing
 - **Improve walkability at every phase:** accelerate the shift to car-free living, ensure complete mixed-use DNA at every phase, prioritize early implementation of public realm, public space, and social infrastructure; and
 - **Improve infrastructure planning:** enable better decision-making and alignment of hard and soft infrastructure with development timeline.
- Performance
 - **Reach sustainability goals:** enable effective testing, monitoring, and reporting of performance at a neighborhood scale;
 - **Improve collaboration:** use the platform as a conversational tool to build a cross-sector, cross-jurisdictional working group to sustain ongoing collaboration; and
 - **Synergize resources and expand city-building mandate:** leverage geospatialDENVER's function as a decision support system to track sustainability, and use the shared platform for industry to test new technologies (such as autonomous shuttle).

Denver has earned its international recognition for sustainability, digital capacity, and innovation in the city's partnership with development industries and technology companies. With more than 10 new infill developments per year, over three large-scale multi-phased redevelopments and master plans underway, numerous capital projects at planning and implementation stage, and over 12 sustainability areas that require ongoing tracking and reporting, a digital twin can be a common shared platform for city-building collaboration and solution testing and serve as a one-stop shop 2D and 3D platforms.



Transportation

AS THE PANEL LEARNED THROUGH THE BRIEFING MATERIALS AND SITE TOUR, Speer Boulevard plays an unusual and important transportation role. It is a rare radial route in Denver, in this case linking downtown and the Cherry Creek neighborhood. It provides access to downtown as well as a bypass of downtown entirely, and it has one of four downtown interchanges with I-25. Speer Boulevard is also a gateway to downtown from I-25 as well as a serving as a backdoor for key facilities due to the orientation of the Convention Center and Denver Performing Arts Center, which back up to the boulevard.

Speer Boulevard Uses

Speer Boulevard is a busy street carrying 50,000 to 60,000 vehicles daily between Colfax Avenue and I-25 (pre-pandemic). The busiest intersections are at Colfax Avenue and Auraria Parkway. Traffic uses Speer Boulevard to enter and leave downtown, primarily at Blake Street and Market Street (about 17,000 vehicles daily each) and to a lesser extent at Wewatta Street, Larimer Street, Lawrence Street, Arapahoe Street, and Champa Street, which generally carry 5,000 to 7,000 vehicles daily each. Much of that traffic uses Auraria Parkway for highway access. The panel notes that existing data is unclear about how much traffic on Speer Boulevard is through traffic, rather than turning traffic.

Speer has eight lanes plus one to three turn lanes through the study area, making it one of the widest roads in Denver. Other

heavily traveled arterials such as Federal Boulevard and Colorado Boulevard typically have six lanes plus a turn lane at intersections. Those streets carry from 50,000 to as many as 72,000 vehicles daily. While Speer has more closely spaced intersections, the panel notes that it has more lanes than its volumes need in comparison with other major arterials.

Stakeholders interviewed by the panel universally agree that speeding is a problem on Speer Boulevard, despite its posted 35 miles per hour limit. Although no recent speed studies have been completed, no one disputed the fact of speeding as a routine occurrence.

There are currently 15 pedestrian crosswalks at 10 intersections along Speer Boulevard's 1.1-mile length in this area. Available pedestrian counts are 15 years old and showed only a few hundred

people crossing the boulevard during commuting hours. Many changes since that time have undoubtedly increased the number of people crossing, but even if four or five times more people cross, the volume is small compared with many downtown streets.

Speer Boulevard Character

Speer Boulevard continues the legacy of a path along Cherry Creek that has been used by people in this area for centuries. In the 20th century, it was built as part of Denver's embrace of the City Beautiful movement. Although altered north of Colfax from its earlier boulevard design, the wider Speer has sporadic tree canopies but remains a swath of green landscape through downtown.

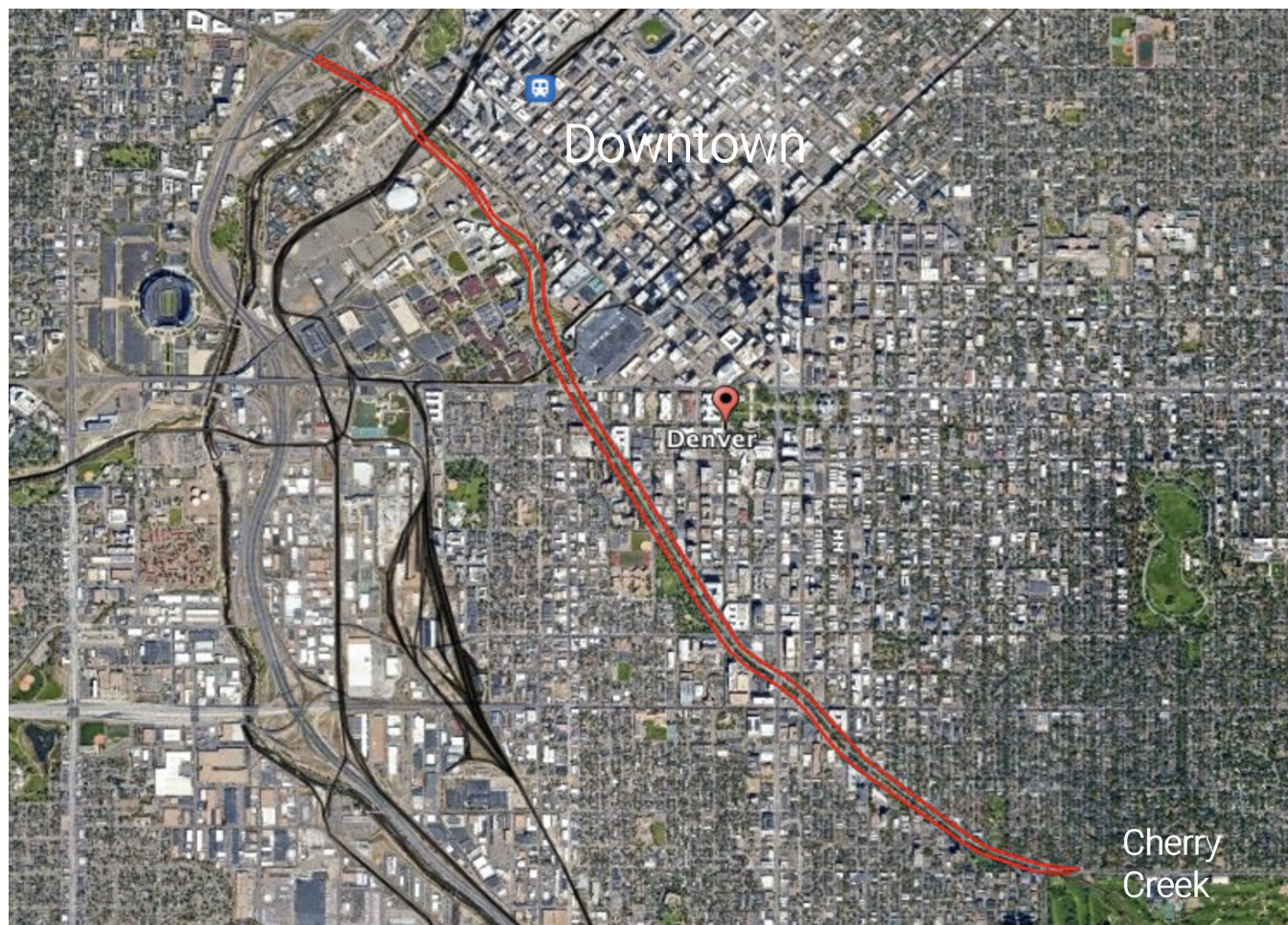
The combined street and creek corridor varies in width through the study area from as little as 250 feet at Wynkoop to as much as 570 feet at Larimer. These wide swaths differentiate this segment from other parts of Speer Boulevard south of Colfax that is typically around 250 feet wide. The panel found that there are compelling views of downtown to the south and east and of the mountains to the north and west, which remain hallmarks of the

corridor for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. However, the width of Speer exposes pedestrians to as many as seven lanes of traffic in one direction, a daunting prospect for crossing. The panel understands that numerous pedestrians have been hit by vehicles, making this part of Speer Boulevard among the city's most dangerous street crossings.



RYAN CAMBRIDGE

A view of the intersection of Speer Boulevard and Larimer Street, highlighting the multi-lane Speer Boulevard and the mountains visible beyond the Auraria Campus.



GOOGLE EARTH, ULI

Speer Boulevard runs along the western part of Denver, from Interstate 25 to the Cherry Creek neighborhood. Running adjacent to the standard grid pattern, it is a radial route that acts as a gateway to downtown from Interstate 25.



Speer Boulevard runs through Denver's urban core, an area with several critical functions and destinations for the city.

The Larger Context and Current Conditions

Rather than being an edge or a ring, Speer Boulevard runs through Denver's urban core. This area is home to several critical functions and destinations for the city:

- LoDo (Lower Downtown): entertainment, residential and transit hub;
- Central Business District: office core, convention center, and Denver Performing Arts Center;
- Civic Center: government offices and museums;
- Auraria Campus: multi-level higher education center;
- Ball Arena: major sporting and entertainment events;
- River Mile: recreation and location of future mixed-use development; and
- Cherry Creek and Cherry Creek Trail: water access, historical significance, outdoor recreation, an important urban ecological corridor.

As noted previously, few pedestrians cross Speer Boulevard relative to the total population in downtown and Auraria. This circumstance reflects two major influences: purpose and determination. It is the panel's observation that few people have

a reason to cross Speer Boulevard. Those that do are going to academic classes, using transit—primarily light-rail stops, going downtown from campus to access restaurants, retail options, or to go home, attending events at Ball Arena, or accessing Cherry Creek Trail.

To cross, pedestrians must also possess steely determination. Crossing Speer Boulevard is a long distance (130 feet to 350 feet) and takes time (1.5 minutes to three minutes). To cross Cherry Creek and open space between the central business district and the Auraria Campus, more time is generally needed, thus increasing the full crossing time to four to five minutes.

Adding to this daunting experience is traffic volume, speed, and noise, as well as a lack of weather protection and bareness of the walking route. The panel found that there are few visual clues to lead one's eye to a destination or even to the walking route to get there. Safety is also a concern considering vehicle collisions with pedestrians, as mentioned by stakeholders. Finally, there are several awkward crossings, such as at Speer Boulevard and Curtis Street, where the crossing path is 30 percent longer than the distance across Speer Boulevard.

Therefore, it is the panel's observation that Speer Boulevard's current configuration, traffic, and adjacent property conditions are incompatible with a successful, walkable downtown.

Transportation-Based Recommendations

To address the challenges that the current configuration of Speer Boulevard presents, the panel recommends creating a better urban context. To do so, the panel recommends several design and development conditions that are outlined below and, when relevant, expanded upon in this report.

The panel believes that a more vibrant Auraria Campus with mixed-use development and public programming that will generate pedestrian traffic to downtown and to campus is needed. The panel recommends that this effort include stronger visual attractions to the campus for pedestrians and reorienting the Denver Performing Arts Center and the Convention Center to face (front) Speer Boulevard and encourage people to walk between Auraria and those public event facilities.

Creating a Better Urban Context—New Speer Boulevard

In terms of road configuration, the panel recommends shrinking Speer Boulevard between Colfax Avenue and Auraria Parkway to six lanes, plus turn lanes as required, with surface bike lanes. The reduction of lanes is consistent with the traffic volumes on Speer Boulevard and other major city streets in Denver. It would also result in the gain of about 130 feet of frontage for additional open space or buildings. This new configuration could be tested immediately,

in advance of rebuilding Speer Boulevard as a narrower, six-lane street, with simple and temporary markings and planters, much like the new bike lanes the panel observed on downtown streets.

At the same time, the panel recommends shifting the Cherry Creek corridor to the east side of the roadway. This will create an urban edge along the Auraria Campus and enhance open space near the creek. It will also allow for additional buildings on the east side of Speer Boulevard and provide a strong, new front door to the Denver Performing Arts Center and Colorado Convention Center.

Creating a Better Urban Context—New Street Character

The panel also recommends reducing vehicle speeds, especially on Auraria Parkway and Speer Boulevard, using both street design and lower speed limits. Specifically, the panel recommends the following to address vehicle speeds:

- Implement narrower lanes at 10 to 11 feet.
- Reduce the turn radius where possible and eliminate separate right-turn lanes.
- Create the perception of narrower streets with protected bike lanes, landscaping, and shallower setbacks for buildings.
- Lower the speed limit to 25 or 30 miles per hour, which will also reduce risk of pedestrian deaths.



An illustration of the pedestrian crossing path at an intersection along Speer Boulevard.

The panel believes that several benefits flow from taking steps to pursue a narrower, slower Speer Boulevard and create safer, more attractive crossings. These include reducing pedestrian exposure to vehicles with fewer lanes and enriching pedestrians' experience with landscaping and art. The panel also recommends exploring options to take crossings above or below the boulevard where surface conditions remain awkward and where intriguing experiences of the creek and landscape could be achieved. While surface crossings should be the main emphasis, select locations may benefit from separating the pedestrian realm from the street. Related to Cherry Creek, expanding views and access to the trail itself could also be a benefit produced by these efforts.

Implementation

As indicated, testing out the new configuration of Speer Boulevard can happen now within the existing street structure by using temporary barriers to create bike lanes and block the existing inside lanes except at intersections.

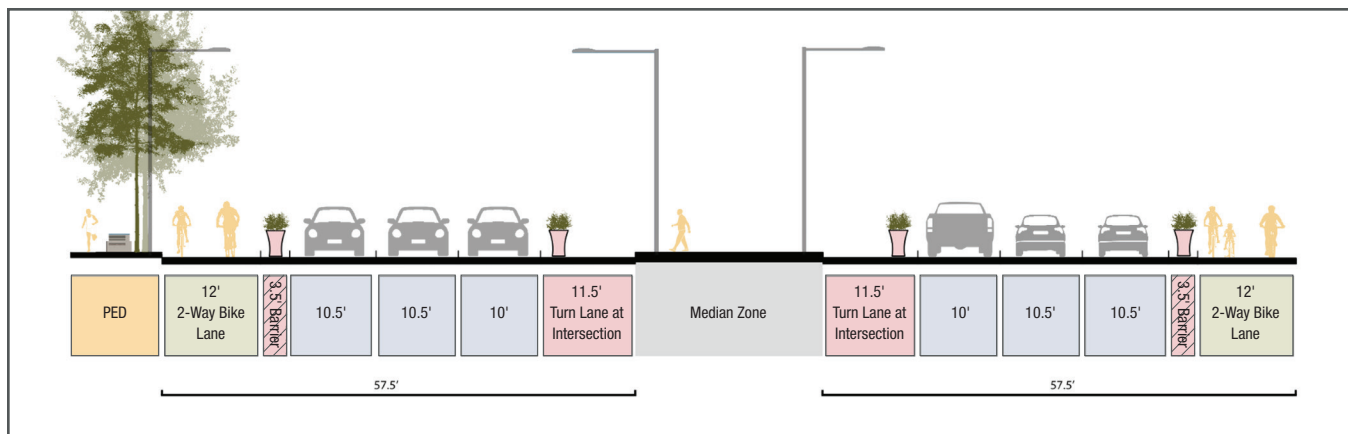
As testing this new configuration is underway, the panel recommends that the sponsor team begin to refine the transportation plan for Speer Boulevard. This includes monitoring and learning from the test configuration as well as starting to address several other key transportation elements including the following:

- Monitor transportation conditions on Speer Boulevard when piloting the six-lane configuration and apply lessons learned to future planning efforts.

- Use transportation modeling to test alternate intersection configurations such as roundabouts on Speer Boulevard for their ability to move traffic at modest speeds with a minimal number of lanes. Roundabouts may be most beneficial at the multiroad intersection of Wazee Street, Blake Street, and Speer Boulevard to reduce redundant street segments.
- Enhance corridor crossings with views of Cherry Creek, landscaping, art, and weather protection.
- Explore opportunities to cross over or below the roadway where intriguing experiences could be achieved and awkward surface crossings resolved.

At a higher level, the panel recommends that the sponsors also do the following for a more complete approach to transportation in this area:

- Expand the geographic scope of downtown planning efforts to include Auraria, as has been done for Ball Arena and the River Mile.
- Revisit zoning requirements for parking to establish maximums, which the panel believes is the single most important tool to boost use of transit, walking, and cycling.
- Review campus transportation benefits to ensure that travel alternatives are maximized for all students, staff, and faculty. For example, a universal transit pass could be automatically issued to all campus users as part of their identification cards, so that transit can be used whenever they choose.
- Strengthen planning collaboration among all agency departments and partners.



The panel recommends an updated, six-lane configuration for Speer Boulevard between Colfax Avenue and Auraria Parkway.



Incorporating Open Space along Cherry Creek

CHERRY CREEK HAS PLAYED A NOTABLE ROLE IN DENVER'S HISTORY. It is an area that had been inhabited primarily by members of the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes of Indigenous peoples for hundreds of years before the platting of Denver's earliest neighborhoods in 1859.

In 1907, the streambed of Cherry Creek was channelized and contained on both banks by 15-foot-tall concrete floodwalls designed to minimize the impacts of regular flooding on downtown Denver. In its current alignment, the portion of Cherry Creek in the panel's study area runs parallel to Speer Boulevard, from which it is vertically separated by about 15 to 20 feet. The entire length of Cherry Creek within the study area remains channelized and is largely devoid of the native plants typically found along creeks such as this.

However, the panel believes that Cherry Creek is a critical part of the open space and recreational amenities for this part of Denver today. Therefore, the panel recommends that the sponsor team see Cherry Creek as the heart of the Cherry Creek Corridor, and the following recommendations focus on highlighting the actions that can be taken to incorporate it into the broader vision for this area.

As discussed earlier, Speer Boulevard was originally designed by the famed landscape architect George Kessler in 1907 as a tree-lined parkway. However, the Speer Boulevard of today, particularly within the study area, is an intimidating, eight- to ten-lane inner-city highway whose high speeds and large traffic volumes make it one of the most dangerous streets to cross in Denver. These two potential assets, in their current configuration, separate Denver's oldest neighborhood—Auraria—on the west from what has been historically recognized as the core of downtown Denver to the east.

Existing Opportunities

Using briefing materials provided by the sponsor, input from stakeholders, and observations made during the panel engagement, the panel identified several opportunities to expand and further incorporate open space along Speer Boulevard.



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Examples of existing opportunities to incorporate open space along Speer Boulevard include access to water, the Cherry Creek Trail, and about 73 acres of city-owned land.

Examples of existing challenges when adding recreation and open space along Speer Boulevard include safety concerns in secluded areas, trail and Cherry Creek maintenance, and a narrow trail corridor for the number of desired users.

- Access to a waterbody is rare in Denver, and even in Cherry Creek’s current configuration, it is viewed as a recreational asset.
- A significant amount of city-owned land (73 acres) in the form of green spaces, rights-of-way, and parking lots present opportunities for expanding open space.
- The well-used Cherry Creek Trail with good north–south connectivity is another opportunity.
- The Cherry Creek Trail has a unique environment that is slightly cooler and quieter than street level because of the grade change along Cherry Creek within the study area.
- From an infrastructure standpoint, multiple pedestrian and vehicular bridges cross the creek from east to west.
- Multiple adjacent uses could benefit and interact with the creek, including the Auraria Campus, the Denver Performing Arts Center, and the Colorado Convention Center.

Existing Challenges

The panel also identified several challenges that the current configurations of Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek present.

- Cherry Creek is 15 feet or more below street level with few and infrequent access points.
- The trail corridor is too narrow to accommodate the desired number of users and uses. Because of this, bicycle traffic dominates and can create dangerous interactions between cyclists and other trail users such as walkers, joggers, and people with dogs.
- Meaningful riparian ecosystems (vegetation and wildlife where land meets water) or habitats are lacking.
- To the best of the panel’s knowledge, Cherry Creek’s water quality is unknown.

- Overpasses present a challenge. These are often dark and secluded spaces that can present safety concerns. These areas are also sheltered from winter weather and are cool in the summer, making them and the creek a desirable destination for unhoused and/or transient individuals.
- The panel observed general neglect and maintenance challenges, primarily litter, along the creek and trail.
- As discussed elsewhere in this report, crossing east–west from downtown Denver to the Auraria Campus across Speer Boulevard is difficult and objectively dangerous, given its width, vehicle speeds, and high level of traffic volume.
- Green spaces front either Speer Boulevard or the back or rear of adjacent buildings, limiting access and awareness of public amenities.
- Many areas along the Cherry Creek Corridor are secluded and lack visibility, and other areas lack activation, limiting its current use to a transportation corridor and nothing more.

Design-Focused Open-Space Recommendations

The panel believes that the purpose of strategically adding open space to Speer Boulevard has dual goals: one is to create high-quality green space, and the other is for the future Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor (discussed below) to deliver multiple benefits that align with or realize broad, citywide goals, such as the following:

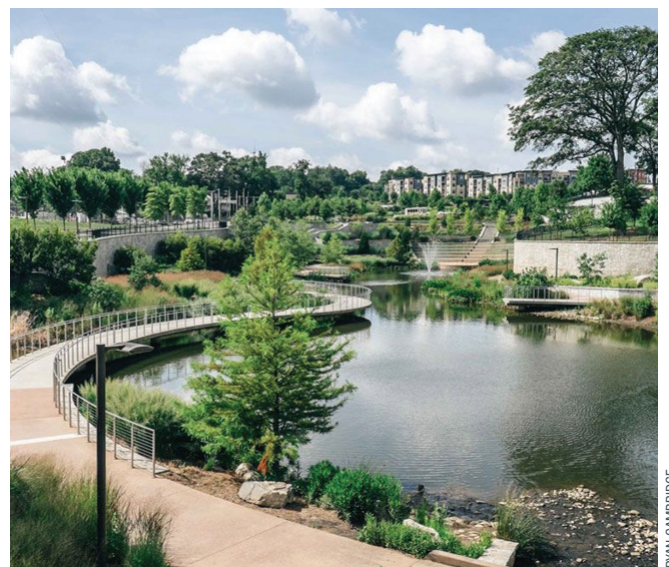
- Improving the quality-of-life experience of residents and students, which will encourage them to remain in downtown Denver;
- Creating a dynamic, walkable, and integrated amenity that catalyzes equitable private investment along the corridor, specifically developments that bring affordable and family-friendly housing options to downtown;
- Mitigating negative effects of climate change on the downtown area; and
- Acknowledging, embracing, and conveying the unique and complicated history of the corridor and downtown Denver as a whole, specifically as it relates to the Indigenous populations of both past and present.

To help the sponsors reimagine the open space around Speer Boulevard and Cherry Creek, the panel formulated the following recommendations. For clarity, the recommendations are initially highlighted, followed by a discussion regarding each.

Embrace the Cherry Creek alignment as a cultural corridor that celebrates the history and impact of the corridor and its various people groups. To do this, the panel recommends establishing a community-driven identity and brand for the corridor that embraces the history of the creek, its people (both past and present), and its importance to downtown Denver. To achieve this, the panel recommends the following:

- Develop an experiential teaching tool that can educate visitors about the history and importance of the creek, beginning with its management and use by Indigenous populations.
- Educate visitors about the importance of green infrastructure and natural ecosystems in mitigating the negative effects of climate change.
- Identify and celebrate significant cultural icons, individuals, and institutions that contribute to the unique identity of Denver.

Design, program, and fund the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor as both infrastructure and amenity. The panel believes that it is important that the sponsor team retains or increases the capacity of the existing infrastructure to address known flooding constraints without compromising the recreational value of the corridor. This includes naturalizing the creek alignment to allow for both slow and fast-moving water, embracing alternative “wall” solutions that activate and/or improve the aesthetic and scale of the pedestrian environment, creating natural ponding and pooling areas to temporarily contain floodwaters, capturing and treating stormwater runoff, and integrating flood-resilient structures and amenities along the creek.



The Fourth Ward Park in Atlanta is an example of embracing alternative wall solutions and a range of infrastructure options for water that offer a user-friendly aesthetic and scale for the pedestrian environment.

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EXAMPLES OF CORRIDOR DESTINATION ELEMENTS

- Nature play spaces
- Bouldering walls and climbing elements
- Pump tracks and skill-based bicycle elements
- Interactive public art and interpretive installations
- Performance spaces
- Destination playgrounds
- Outdoor fitness equipment and guides

Design to mitigate effects of climate change for both current and future downtown residents. The panel recommends reestablishing a riparian ecosystem and wetland environment that cool the adjacent environments by retaining moisture and providing shade within the Cherry Creek corridor. This includes embracing resilient, native landscapes that are drought and heat tolerant, creating a habitat for pollinators and native animal species, and appropriately shading key amenities, such as playgrounds, to increase use.

Increase the amount of meaningful green space along the Cherry Creek alignment, which will meet the daily needs of adjacent residents and workers while catalyzing private investment that embraces the creek as an asset. To do this, the panel believes it is important that the sponsor team ensures equitable access, both physical and visual, to existing green spaces. When necessary, the panel recommends that the sponsor create additional, more frequent, and more accessible (ADA) access points, even if temporary. The panel also recommends naturalizing the creek alignment wherever possible. In addition, the selective removal of some of the existing floodwalls will allow the creation of new green spaces that can be designed to improve or reestablish riparian ecosystems. The sponsor should also look to create public green spaces that bridge both sides of Speer Boulevard on multiple vertical planes, including the creek level beneath the roadway, at road level, and elevated by building a land bridge.

Create a series of destinations distributed along the corridor that are multigenerational, multicultural, and multiseasonal. To do this, the panel recommends emphasizing quality-of-life amenities that both meet the daily needs of nearby residents and workers and serve as iconic and/or unique destinations which draw visitors to the corridor. The panel also recommends that the sponsor explore the opportunity for extensions of adjacent cultural



Conceptual image of public green spaces that could be created to bridge both sides of Speer Boulevard, including at the level of Cherry Creek below the roadway between the Denver Performing Arts Complex and the Auraria Campus.



Destination playground at Paco Sanchez Park in Denver.



Lighting can both be appealing and provide added safety for portions of the trail, such as underpasses.

FLIKR, SHANNON MCGEE

land uses and destinations, such as the performing arts center and convention center, into park spaces. The panel encourages the sponsor to embrace proven principles of placemaking to create authentic, unique, and activated spaces of a variety of scales, at both the creek and street levels along Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard.

Facilitate safe, comfortable, and efficient pedestrian circulation both within the corridor and from the corridor into the neighborhoods to the east and west. To do this, the panel recommends developing a series of separated pedestrian trails and pathways that are suitable for efficient commuting, as well as more pedestrian uses such as running and walking. Examples of distinct uses include technical bike courses, walking paths, bicycle trails, and shared hardscape (paved) spaces. Additional high-capacity, two-way cycle tracks could also be added along Speer Boulevard that will help shift some commuter through-traffic from the creek level to the street level, thus reducing congestion. With this configuration, bicycle-specific facilities will still be provided at the creek level; however, they will cater to a different user than the cycle tracks.

The panel also recommends exploring opportunities to provide separate east–west pedestrian traffic access to the corridor at street level from Speer Boulevard in key locations. Ways to do

this include green underpasses and land bridges or pedestrian bridges, which also present an opportunity to introduce iconic gateway structures.

Increase the perception of user safety along the corridor, at both the creek and street levels. The panel believes that good maintenance of the corridor and consistent activation can support both crime reduction and crime prevention. Parks that are well kept—free of litter and vandalism, and well maintained—are often perceived as poor choices for the location of crimes such as drug dealing, gang activity, or violent crime. This is due to the perception that such crimes will be witnessed by one of the possibly many users who frequent the park.

The panel also recommends integrating selective safety or area lighting, especially beneath overpasses. The use of light in these settings presents an opportunity to do so in a way that is both artistically and aesthetically interesting and functionally useful. The panel recommends increasing the visibility into and from the Cherry Creek Corridor from the street level as well. This can be achieved by selectively opening eye-level viewsheds into the corridor. In addition, new private development that fronts and embraces the corridor will provide additional “eyes on the park,” which is a proven strategy for both reducing and subsequently preventing undesirable behavior. In addition, increasing the amount of evening programming and events can help this effort by activating park space in the latter half of the day.

Implementation—One Step at a Time

Realizing the full potential of the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor will require multiple phases of implementation, some of which will likely occur in concert with adjacent development or infrastructure projects where the city can capitalize on economies of scale and equitable partnerships.

Develop a Master Plan

A key first step in implementing the broad vision of a cultural corridor is the commissioning and development of a comprehensive master plan for the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor. This plan should seek to:

- Articulate a thoughtful, honest, and community-driven vision for the corridor;
- Identify and locate key uses, circulation routes, and destinations;
- Develop and codify comprehensive green infrastructure design standards;
- Identify and embrace design best practices for urban trails and bikeways using resources such as the National Association of Transportation Officials;

- Identify opportunities, both public and private, to partner with other large-scale improvement projects to implement portions of the master plan;
- Develop a detailed implementation strategy that identifies potential partners (for construction, activation, and maintenance); funding sources (both traditional and alternative); and short-term interventions that work together toward the larger goal; and
- Estimate and budget for both capital and operational/maintenance costs. Allocate a minimum of 10 percent of the capital budget and construction cost to establish a dedicated maintenance endowment or fund.

Partner for Success

The city must meaningfully engage key stakeholders and stakeholder groups and institutions in the development of the master plan for the corridor in order to proactively identify and create opportunities for partnership and activation. For this effort to be successful, the panel acknowledges that the amount of money and in-kind support a stakeholder/partner is willing to contribute is generally only as great as the perceived value that they will receive within a realistic time frame. In addition, to protect their own brand and image, stakeholders/partners will



The panel recommends identifying physical activations along Cherry Creek. One example is using existing walls as vertical gardens, which can present an opportunity to engage local partners that focus on addressing food insecurity or homelessness.

want assurances that, in the case of capital sponsorships, the parks/facilities that they associate with are well maintained and activated over the long term.

Proactively Plan for the Impacts of Increased Use and Demand from Future Residential Growth

The panel recommends meeting these challenges for the park system by implementing a thoughtful and equitable park and open-space impact fee structure. Park impact fees are payments collected by a local government from a developer/new development as a condition of that development's approval. As defined by the American Planning Association, the purpose of these fees, in the context of parks, is to offset the increased demand/strain/use placed on the existing parks system level of service because of the development proposed. The intent of park impact fees is not to increase the level of service of a community, but rather to maintain it in the face of additional growth or change. Impact fees derived from a development must be used in a way that benefits the residents of that particular development.

Leverage All Viable Funding Options

The panel recommends that the sponsor team continue to leverage all viable, existing funding mechanisms, both traditional and alternative. Potential funding sources the panel recommends further evaluating include the general fund budget for the city, tax increment financing (TIF) districts, public benefits agreements (PBAs), bond funding, and sales taxes.

Property Taxes: Many parks systems derive the majority of their operational funding from ad valorem (property) taxes collected by their local governments. These taxes are applied to every eligible parcel as a percentage of the taxable (assessed) value of the property. Revenues from these taxes are generally very stable/predictable; however, they are also shared among all the city's departments, and parks can be subject to budget cuts in times of financial strain.

Tax Increment Financing: Another funding mechanism might be a TIF district. TIF is a funding mechanism used by local governments for large-scale development or redevelopment projects. The panel recommends that parks, trails, and green spaces be part of the amenities considered when developing a TIF district plan.

Public Benefits Agreements: PBAs, which are also known as community benefits agreements (CBAs), are binding agreements or contracts between a coalition of local community groups/organizations and a real estate developer that require the developer to meet specific conditions—such as the inclusion of parks and/or trails within their development—in order to obtain the support

POTENTIAL ACTIVATION PARTNERS

- City of Denver
- AHEC, CCD, MSU Denver, and CU Denver
- Private developers of Ball Arena and River Mile
- DDP
- Other parks, open space, and trail-specific friends groups
- Local arts institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
- Colorado Convention Center
- Denver Performing Arts Center
- Greenway Foundation
- And many more

(and therefore not the opposition) of the influential community groups within the coalition for the project proposed by the developer. Like TIF districts, PBAs can and should include negotiations for how the developer of the project can improve parks and trails within the city in which the development is proposed. Unlike TIF districts, these projects can occur outside the official boundary of the proposed project.

Municipal Bonds: Municipal bonds are loans taken out by a local government for a specific funding need. Bonds are sold by the local government to investors based on the assumption that the investors will be repaid their investment plus some amount of interest over the life of the bond. Local governments often use bonds to pay for large capital projects such as schools, stadiums, infrastructure, and with increasing frequency, parks. The benefit of bonds is that they provide a significant influx of cash immediately, allowing communities to undertake large-scale projects that would otherwise require funding beyond what is available at the time the project is constructed.

Sales Taxes: The panel understands that Denver currently uses a parks-specific sales tax to fund a portion of its annual budget. This funding mechanism is particularly successful in Denver because the city can collect revenues from the significant amount of annual visitor spending. The panel cautions, though, that in general this source of revenue might place a disproportionate burden on low-income consumers.



FLIKR, SEATTLE/OGANEWS

Outdoor yoga event.



FLIKR, JOCELYN KINGBORN

An example of an interactive art installation.

Increase Awareness and Advocates through Activation

The complete revitalization of the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor will likely be a substantial, multi-phase project that requires multiple partners and broad support from the public to fully realize. The panel believes that this process can be accelerated if the city increases the number of citizen advocates passionate about the project's potential. By bringing new people into the corridor, even in its existing or interim condition, increasing awareness of the corridor's potential is possible. The panel recommends the implementation of proven placemaking techniques and interventions, which do not necessarily have to be complicated, expensive, or permanent, to energize and activate the corridor while long-term revitalization and reconfiguration efforts take place.

The panel recommends the sponsors explore and implement several place-based interventions along the corridor. Activating the existing floodwalls, both physically and visually, is one type of intervention. This effort could include integration of new public art, such as murals that tell the story of the corridor or illustrate a potential future for the corridor. The existing walls can also be productive landscapes using vertical gardens, which might open the opportunity to engage local partners that focus on combatting food insecurity or homelessness. Other physical activations appropriate for selective locations include potential locations for bouldering and vertical play spaces.

Another activation source recommended by the panel is using light as art. The sponsors can use temporary, artistic lighting to illuminate dark spaces beneath overpasses not only to increase perceptions of safety, but also to soften or energize the often harsh aesthetic of these areas.

Temporary events and programs also readily provide place-based interventions and increase activation. The panel recommends that the sponsor explore the feasibility of working with various community partners to host temporary events and functions along the corridor, especially at creek level. Such programming will give residents and visitors a reason to visit and could take advantage of existing infrastructure, such as the shaded portions of overpasses along the Cherry Creek Trail. The panel recommends that the sponsor keep in mind that this programming should seek to do the following:

- Bring people into the various unique spaces along the corridor;
- Educate the participants/visitors on the unique history/attributes of the corridor; and
- Convey/illustrate the full potential of the corridor as a cultural green-space destination, not just as an infrastructural system or means of circulation.

TEMPORARY PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES

- Pop-up markets
- Food truck gatherings
- Small concerts
- Speaking sessions
- Learn-to-bike days with local public safety entities and bicycle/pedestrian NGO groups
- Walking tours/historical tours
- Interactive art events (paint-by-number murals, etc.)
- Rubber duck races
- Creek cleanup days



Summary

A CRITICAL STEP IN ANY PROJECT IS CONVERTING PLANS TO ACTION. While implementation of the panel’s recommendations is detailed within each section of this report, the following chart provides a summary of the recommendations provided by the panel and an overarching timeline for these actions.

Implementation Guide

Connecting higher education with downtown

Short term

- Continue work already underway to make Larimer Street and Speer Boulevard more pedestrian-friendly and an inviting crossing to and from the Auraria Campus and downtown Denver. Add an iconic piece or pieces of public art to represent the connection between these two areas.
- Leverage the premier urban setting of the Auraria Campus in the state and distinguish offerings accordingly.
- Think strategically about AHEC’s real estate and take the following actions to lay the groundwork for success:
 - Add real estate responsibilities to existing state entity (AHEC).
 - Manage the land and master plan the campus.
 - Engage private developers and negotiate on behalf of the campus.
 - Unlock the full value and potential of Auraria Campus and Speer Boulevard.
 - Use Speer Boulevard as a physical connection between downtown and Auraria Campus.

(continued on next page)

Implementation Guide

Connecting higher education with downtown *(continued)*

Medium term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add new or expanded offerings and credentials outside conventional degree programs and develop and enhance collaborations with private-sector entities to upskill employees and train the upcoming workforce. • Reposition AHEC not simply as a service provider for the Auraria Campus but also as a real estate acquisition arm.
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughtfully integrate and identify mutually supportive agendas as large upcoming projects move from proposal to development (e.g., Ball Arena, River Mile). • Consider a public/private partnership structure for development projects.
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address issues in the urban core and downtown related to economic development, social services, and tourism, among others. • Collaborate with stakeholders (public and private) to set a unified vision for a reimagined campus

The public realm and a mixed-use, walkable community

Short term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add family-oriented facilities and housing across downtown and the Auraria Campus areas supported by walkable access to daycares and healthy food. • Provide programmable social spaces and broadband internet connections to attract talents and create innovation and a knowledge-based economy. • Kick-start the master-planning process for the Auraria Campus with a public realm plan. • Develop a public realm plan that focuses on co-benefits, integration with the surrounding context, and addressing key elements, including active mobility, history and culture, integrating the campus into the surrounding neighborhoods, and converting parking facilities into walkable areas. • Encourage people to make walking and cycling their top choice for transportation and show immediate progress by facilitating pedestrian and bicycle access to these facilities and encouraging more families with children to come onto campus. • Further digital capacity and develop a living digital twin of key geographic areas of focus.
Medium term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift from a commuter campus to a live-in campus to free up on-site parking facilities within the Auraria Campus, and unlock that developable land for higher and better uses that increase both capital and operational value. This approach can set the foundation for transforming the six parking lots into mixed-use vertical campuses. • Make efforts to bring the surrounding natural assets into the Auraria Campus.
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert existing buildings and parking facilities into housing and family-oriented amenities. • Seek to invest in high-density, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development around the existing light-rail stations. • Create walk-to and cycle-to multi-use community hubs on the Auraria Campus, with additional programs that reflect the unique offerings of AHEC and the three institutions, based on a wellness-for-all framework that focuses on lifelong learning.

Implementation Guide

Transportation	
Short term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the new configuration of Speer Boulevard within the existing street structure by using temporary barriers to create bike lanes and blocking the existing inside lanes except at intersections. • Monitor transportation conditions on Speer Boulevard when piloting the six-lane configuration and apply lessons learned to future planning efforts. • Use transportation modeling to test alternate intersection configurations such as roundabouts on Speer Boulevard for their ability to move traffic at modest speeds with a minimal number of lanes. Roundabouts may be most beneficial at the multi-road intersection of Wazee Street, Blake Street, and Speer Boulevard to reduce redundant street segments. • Review campus transportation benefits to maximize travel alternatives for all students, staff, and faculty. For example, a universal transit pass could be automatically issued to all campus users as part of their identification cards, so that transit can be used whenever they choose.
Medium term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance corridor crossings with views of Cherry Creek, landscaping, art, and weather protection. • Explore opportunities to cross over or below the roadway where intriguing experiences could be achieved and awkward surface crossings resolved. • Revisit zoning requirements for parking to establish maximums, which the panel believes is the single most important tool to boost use of transit, walking, and cycling.
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrink Speer Boulevard between Colfax Avenue and Auraria Parkway to six lanes, plus turn lanes as required, with surface bike lanes. • Shift the Cherry Creek corridor to the east side of the roadway.
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the geographic scope of downtown planning efforts to include Auraria, Ball Arena, and the River Mile. • Strengthen planning collaboration among all agency departments and partners
Incorporating open space along Cherry Creek	
Short term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a community-driven identity and brand for the corridor that embraces the history of the creek, its people (both past and present), and its importance to downtown Denver. • Increase the perception of user safety along the corridor, at both the creek and street levels. • Commission and develop a comprehensive master plan for the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor. • Meaningfully engage key stakeholders and stakeholder groups and institutions in the development of the master plan for the corridor to proactively identify and create opportunities for partnership and activation. • Increase the amount of citizen advocates passionate about the project's potential by bringing new people into the corridor, even in its existing or interim condition, to increase awareness of the corridor's potential.

(continued on next page)

Implementation Guide

Incorporating open space along Cherry Creek *(continued)*

Medium term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design, program, and fund the Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor as both infrastructure and amenity.• Reestablish riparian ecosystems and wetland environments that cool the adjacent environments by retaining moisture and providing shade.• Create a series of destinations distributed along the corridor that are multigenerational, multicultural, and multiseasonal.• Facilitate safe, comfortable, and efficient pedestrian circulation both in the corridor and from the corridor into the neighborhoods to the east and west.• Plan for the impacts of increased use and demand placed on the parks system by future residential growth.• Implement a thoughtful and equitable park and open-space impact fee structure.
Long term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase the amount of meaningful green space along the Cherry Creek alignment that will meet the daily needs of adjacent residents and workers while catalyzing private investment that embraces the creek as an asset.
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leverage all viable funding options: property taxes, tax increment financing, public benefits agreements, municipal bonds, and sales taxes.



Conclusion

THE PANEL BELIEVES THAT THE SPONSOR TEAM HAS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY to work together to reimagine Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard and have an impact on Denver residents, businesses, and students for years to come. Because the sponsor team is at the beginning of this endeavor, the panel offers recommendations with a big-picture perspective that will need to be refined and adapted by the sponsor team over the life of the project.

As the project moves forward, the panel encourages the sponsor team to embrace the importance of the role of education to Denver's future, integrate the Auraria Campus and the downtown, and focus on developing mixed-use communities within the Auraria Campus. Over the long term, these efforts have the potential to elevate Denver's profile nationally and globally, while enhancing the quality of life of students and residents on a day-to-day basis.

Steps can be taken now to build the coalition of support for success in the long term. By prioritizing the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and displaced residents and businesses, enhancing safety and connectivity by testing reconfigurations of Speer Boulevard, enhancing key cross connections between Auraria and downtown, and revitalizing Cherry Creek, the sponsor team can begin today to create a new Speer Corridor that opens the door to improved connectivity and quality of life for all Denver.

About the Panel

Marilyn Jordan Taylor

Panel Chair
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Taylor, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, is a professor of architecture and urbanism, following an eight-year appointment as the dean of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Design, after more than 35 years as architect, urban designer, and partner at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM). Noted for her ability to define and implement strategic cross-disciplinary initiatives, she also served for many years as a member of SOM's Executive Committee and became the first woman chairman of the firm in 2003.

Taylor's design leadership spans nearly five decades of experience on large-scale, mixed-use urban projects and civic initiatives, including work for public entities and community groups, transportation authorities, educational and health care institutions, civic and governmental organizations, and private-sector clients, in cities and regions around the world. She established and led SOM's Airport and Transportation practice with projects at home and around the globe. Her projects have won design awards and broad recognition for her multidisciplinary teams on transportation, urban design, and complex urban projects linking transportation and land use, including the Denver Union Station neighborhood, which was named a 2015 winner of the highly prestigious ULI Global Award for Excellence in Design and Development.

As a professor, she continues her research studio addressing the critical issues facing cities, regions, and neighborhoods, including climate sustainability, resilient infrastructure, community building, and inclusion within our communities and organizations. She served pro bono as team leader and then adviser for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Rebuild by Design Competition and for the global 100 Resilient Cities Program of the Rockefeller Foundation. She was the principal investigator for a Rockefeller Foundation grant supporting the development of a new resilience certificate for graduate students in all fields of design.

Taylor is internationally known for her civic and professional leadership, having served as Rockefeller Fellow of the Partnership for New York City, president of the American Institute of Architects' New York Chapter, chair of the AIA National Urban Design Committee, president of the Urban Design Forum, visiting professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, chair of the New York Building Congress, founding member of New York New Visions following 9/11, and global chair of Urban Land Institute, the first woman and the first architect to serve in this position. She serves as a ULI global governing trustee as well as board member for the Regional Plan Association, the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation, the Urban Design Forum, *Places Journal*, the Piscataquog Land Conservancy, and the Lee Kwan Yew World Cities Prize.

Ryan P. Cambridge

Indianapolis, Indiana

A distinguished graduate of Purdue University, Cambridge is a practicing professional landscape architect—and self-professed “parks geek”—who serves as the president of both the nonprofit Friends of Overlay-Worman Park and FRMWRK Planning + Design in Indianapolis.

Over the past 15 years, Cambridge has helped lead the development in dozens of park planning and design efforts across the United States, representing over \$1 billion in future public realm investment. His work has helped municipalities secure \$250 million of voter-approved funds dedicated solely for parks and public spaces.

During his career, Cambridge has been afforded the privilege of working with distinguished management and research partners such as the Trust for Public Land, the Project for Public Spaces, the Urban Land Institute, and the National Park Service. Locally, he has served on the board of directors for both the Indiana Park and Recreation Association and the Parks Alliance of Indianapolis.

Kelly Nagel

Bethesda, Maryland

Nagel is the founder and managing partner of Residy, a multifamily investment management platform, and is responsible for acquisitions and asset management of the venture's investment portfolio. She has broad experience in multifamily operations, development, and investments in both publicly traded REITs and privately held firms and has developed and asset managed thousands of apartment units.

Before founding Residy, she built and oversaw the multifamily platform and portfolio for a Philadelphia-based real estate private equity fund manager, managing acquisitions, dispositions, financings, redevelopment and capital expenditures, asset and property management. She was a regional vice president at AIMCO Apartment Homes, one of the country's largest owners and operators of apartments, with 125 communities in 17 states, where she was responsible for the company's East Coast investments including acquisitions, developments, redevelopments, and construction. Nagel led development and asset management teams for over \$1.5 billion of multifamily and mixed-use projects throughout the United States. She also provided direction and strategic oversight in key functional areas of operations, marketing, long-range planning, and property management for over 5,700 apartments.

She has held senior positions at AvalonBay Communities and Archstone where she led development teams for over \$600 million of multifamily and mixed-use projects. She started her commercial real estate career at Regency Centers, a leading national retail REIT, where she was responsible for the financial underwriting of acquisitions and developments for multiple markets.

She has been an active member of ULI since 2009, currently serving as a global governing trustee, and is the immediate past chair of the Americas Women's Leadership Initiative. She holds an MBA from Kenan-Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, and a BS in business administration and accounting from Washington and Lee University, where she sits on the advisory boards for the UNC Leonard Wood Center for Real Estate Studies (executive committee and chair of the nominating and governance committee), and the W&L Williams School of Commerce. She is a Girl Scout leader and a board member of Good Shepherd Housing, a nonprofit providing affordable housing and ancillary services in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Wellington “Duke” Reiter

Tempe, Arizona

Reiter, FAIA, is the senior adviser to the president of Arizona State University and the executive director of the University City Exchange (UCX) at ASU. His UCX portfolio features complex, multistakeholder projects involving university/city collaboration, sustainable urbanism, health care, and university design.

Over the past 20 years, Reiter has played numerous roles: academic administrator, faculty member, architect, urban designer, community leader, and public artist. In the course of his career, he has established a track record of highly effective partnerships with public office holders, the business community, nonprofit groups, professional organizations, and private-sector developers. Central to his experience has been the construction of mutually beneficial relationships between the institutions he has led and the cities in which they are located.

Accordingly, Reiter was a key player in the conceptualization and creation of the award-winning Downtown Phoenix Campus for ASU and continues to expand the impact of university engagement via the Central Idea initiative and a proposal entitled NEXUS City—a framework to leverage the unique adjacency of the ASU Polytechnic Campus, the Phoenix-Gateway Airport, and surrounding businesses. At the metropolitan scale, Reiter is spearheading the Rio Reimagined study at the urging of the late Senator McCain, a 40-plus-mile vision that will unite the interests of municipalities and is soon to be designated a priority project via the Federal Urban Waters program. Reiter's most ambitious project at the moment is Ten Across, an expansive undertaking which suggests that the Interstate 10 corridor provides the most compelling window on the future of the country, one which presents the challenges of the 21st century in their highest relief. On the front lines of social, economic, and climate change, the Ten Across initiative positions this region as a living laboratory for the future of the entire country.

Reiter is the past president of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the former dean of the College of Design at Arizona State University, and a longtime faculty member at MIT in the Department of Architecture. He is the recipient of the AIA Arizona Architects Medal and is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He is a ULI trustee and former chair of the University Development and Innovation Council. His projects and visualizations have been featured in numerous museums and Princeton Architectural Press previously published a monograph on Reiter's work, “Vessels and Fields.”

Ross Tilghman

Seattle, Washington

A transportation planning consultant with his own practice, the Tilghman Group, Tilghman creates transportation plans for a wide variety of land uses to fit their environmental, historical, and cultural settings. He brings 37 years of experience, including serving as executive director of a downtown business improvement district.

Tilghman develops circulation and parking solutions for parks, zoos, recreation areas, special event facilities, mixed-use projects, downtowns, and historic districts. His approach emphasizes careful observation of how people use transportation, abiding respect for the setting, and a clear understanding of the client's objectives. Services include transportation master plans, parking management plans, parking revenue projections, and development strategies for governmental, not-for-profit, and private-sector clients facing land use challenges. Tilghman also serves as an expert witness on contested land use/transportation projects in Washington state.

He is a full member of the Urban Land Institute, regularly participating on advisory panels for communities across the country and serving on ULI's Suburban Development and Redevelopment Council. He served five years on the Seattle Design Commission, including one year as chair, reviewing public projects for design excellence. Tilghman recently completed 12 years of volunteer service on an advisory board to Seattle Parks and Recreation as treasurer and then president for a local rowing and sailing center.

Tilghman received his MA in geography from the University of Washington and his BA in history from Washington University in St. Louis.

Yvonne Yeung

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Yeung is a professional planner, urban designer, landscape architect, LEED-accredited professional, and project management professional with over 23 years of private- and public-sector experience delivering high-quality, award-winning, sustainable, transit-oriented communities and vibrant public spaces worldwide. Her work focuses on informing how cities can better position infrastructure investment to deliver healthy, equitable, 15-minute walkable complete communities through synergistic collaboration.

Named a ULI Curtis Infrastructure Fellow, Yeung is the author of the 2023 report *15-Minute Communities: A Leadership Guide*. As vice chair of the ULI Suburban Development and Redevelopment Council and a member of the ULI Toronto Advisory Board and the ULI Women's Leadership Initiative Champions, Yeung founded the Getting to Transit-Oriented Communities Initiative, leading strategic engagement across the region and North America, promoting progressive city-building practices and collaborations between the public and private sectors.

Specializing in team building, executive strategy, large-scale transformation, and cross-sector implementation, she is the recipient of the University of Toronto Rotman School of Management MBA Award and the American Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award. She is a founding member of the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) *Ground* Editorial Board, and past member of the Toronto Public Art Commission, the Canadian Standards Association Design Standards Committee, and the Green Building Certification Institute LEED Review Committee. Her projects have won planning and design excellence awards from the Waterfront Center in Washington, D.C., Canadian Institute of Planners, Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, International Grands Prix Du Design, Ontario Professional Planner Institute, and City of Toronto Urban Design.

Yeung has been a speaker at the Urban Land Institute, UN-Habitat, University of Toronto School of Cities, Smart Cities Expo, Green Roof for Healthy Cities, AMCTO Municipal Leadership Forum, Civic Action, Janes Walk, and university design studios at Toronto, Waterloo, Ryerson, Guelph, Oklahoma, and York. She travels regularly and has recently been to Oslo, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo to document the emerging trends and innovation in sustainability, technology, transit-oriented systems, family-oriented urban living, and land development business models.



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