



**Urban Land  
Institute**

**Advisory Services Program**



# Reimagining Cherry Creek & Speer Boulevard

**DENVER, COLORADO**

**ULI ADVISORY SERVICES**

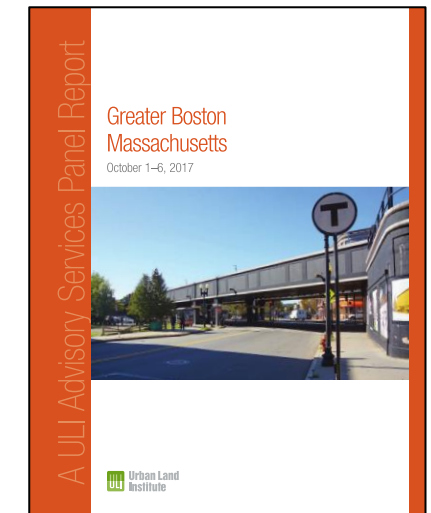
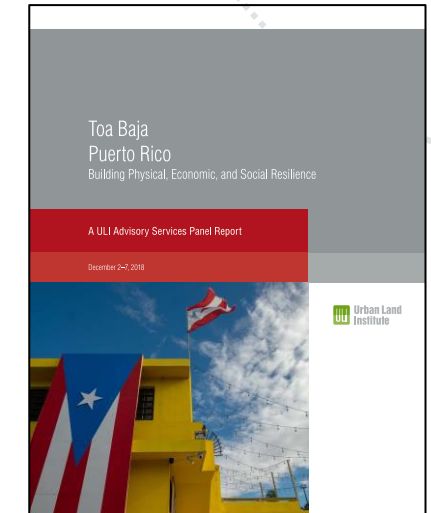
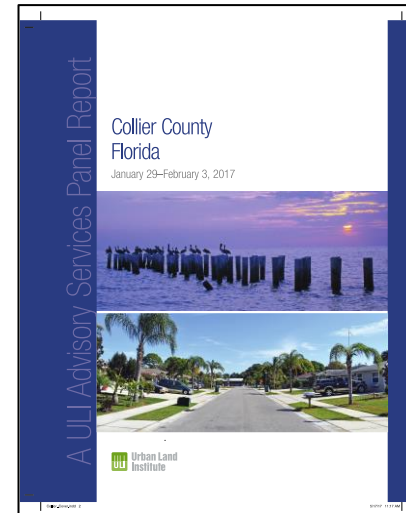
**JULY 17-22, 2022**

# About the Urban Land Institute

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
Denver, CO – July 2022

**ULI Mission:** Shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide

- A multi-disciplinary membership organization with more than 45,000 members in private enterprise and public service
- What the Urban Land Institute does:
  - Conducts Research
  - Provides a forum for sharing of **best practices**
  - Writes, edits, and publishes **books** and **magazines**
  - Organizes and conducts **meetings**
  - Directs outreach programs
  - Conducts **Advisory Service Panels**



# A Time -Tested Program

A five-day process

- Sponsor briefing of challenge or issue
- Site tour
- Stakeholder interviews
- Panel deliberation and recommendations
- Final presentation

Panelists are selected for their subject matter expertise to volunteer and their objectivity



# Reimagining Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard Advisory Services Panel Sponsors

- City & County of Denver
- Auraria Higher Education Campus
- University of Colorado Denver
- Downtown Development Partnership
  
- The JPB Foundation

# Reimagining Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard Stakeholder Interviewees and Participants

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Abbey Christman \* Andrea Kraft \* Andrew Iltis \* Ann Bowers \* Anne Feeser-Olesen \* Annie Rose Hill \* Annie Levinsky \* Anthony Graves \* Bill Vitek \* Bob Pertierra \* Brian McWeeney \* Bruce Uhernik \* Buzz Gellar \* Caelin Johnson \* Carl Meese \* Cary Weatherford \* Chris Herr \* Chris Puckett \* Chris Shears \* Christopher Tryba \* Colleen Walker \* David Chadwick \* David Jula \* David Krutsinger \* David Tryba \* Deborah Cameron \* Dick Farley \* Dillon McBride \* Doug Monroe \* Eären Hummel \* Edward Brown \* Elvis Rubio \* Emily Glockner \* Gordon Robertson \* Greg Dorolek \* Happy Haynes \* Jamie Price \* Janice Sindent \* Janine Davidson \* Jason Longsdorf \* Jenn Hillhouse \* Jennifer Sobanet \* Jered Minter \* Jeremy Hammer \* Jill Jennings \* Jill Locantore \* Jim Watt \* Joey Carrasquillo \* Jon Gambrell \* Josh Laipply \* Kate Barton \* Kate Davenport \* Katie Ross \* Kelly Brough \* Ken Schroppel \* Kourtny Garrett \* Laura Aldrete \* Laura Rodriguez \* Lilly Djanants \* Madeline Grawey \* Marie DeSanctis \* Marilee Utter \* Mark Bernstein \* Mark Broyles \* Mark Kranz \* Marty Steinberg \* Matt Mahoney \* Matthew Helfant \* Michael Kerrigan \* Michael Phibbs \* Michaela Erikson \* Michelle Marks \* Molly Wink \* Nan Ellin \* Philip Friedl \* Ray Gonzalez \* Rhys Duggan \* Rich Carollo \* Riley Wines \* Rodney Milton \* Ryan Aids \* Ryan Meeks 8 Sarah Rockwell \* Sarah Semple Brown \* Shannon Gifford \* Steve Sherman \* Tangelia Wilhite \* Tim Jordan \* Tobin Bliss \* Tracy Huggins \* Zach Hermsen \* And many more

# Reimagining Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard

## What We Heard

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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- A living urban campus
- Leave a 21<sup>st</sup> 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 upon
- Greenspaces must yield multiple community benefits – economic development, green infrastructure, resilience, etc.
- High quality parks and greenspaces are critical to the future of downtown
- Chance for Denver to do something special with Cherry Creek and parks
- Use water to bring people together
- Be bold!

# Reimagining Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard Advisory Services Panel

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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## **Marilyn Jordan Taylor, FAIA (Panel Chair)**

Prof. Architecture & Urbanism  
University of Pennsylvania Weitzman School of Design  
Philadelphia, PA

## **Ryan P. Cambridge, PLA**

President, FRMWRK Planning + Design in Indianapolis  
President, Friends of Overlay-Worman Park  
Indianapolis, IN

## **Kelly Nagel**

Founder & Managing Partner, Residy  
Bethesda, MD

## **Wellington “Duke” Reiter, FAIA**

Senior Advisor to the President of Arizona State University (ASU)  
Executive Director of the University City Exchange (UCX), ASU  
Tempe, AZ

## **Ross Tilghman**

Principal, Tilghman Group  
Seattle, WA

## **Yvonne Yeung, MBA, B.LARCH, PMP, LEED ND AP, OALA, CSLA**

Chief Executive Officer, SDG Strategies  
Toronto, Ontario, CAN

### ULI Staff

**Lauren McKim Callaghan**  
Director, Advisory Services

### **Barbra Gustis**

Director, Advisory Services and Key Leaders

### ULI Panel Advisor

**Marilee Utter**  
President, Citiventure Associates LLC

### University of Colorado Denver, College of Architecture & Planning

**Caelin Johnson**, Year 4 Architect Student, Exp. Graduation Spring 2023

**Riley Wines**, Year 4 Architect Student, Exp. Graduation Spring 2023

# The Panel's Key Recommendations

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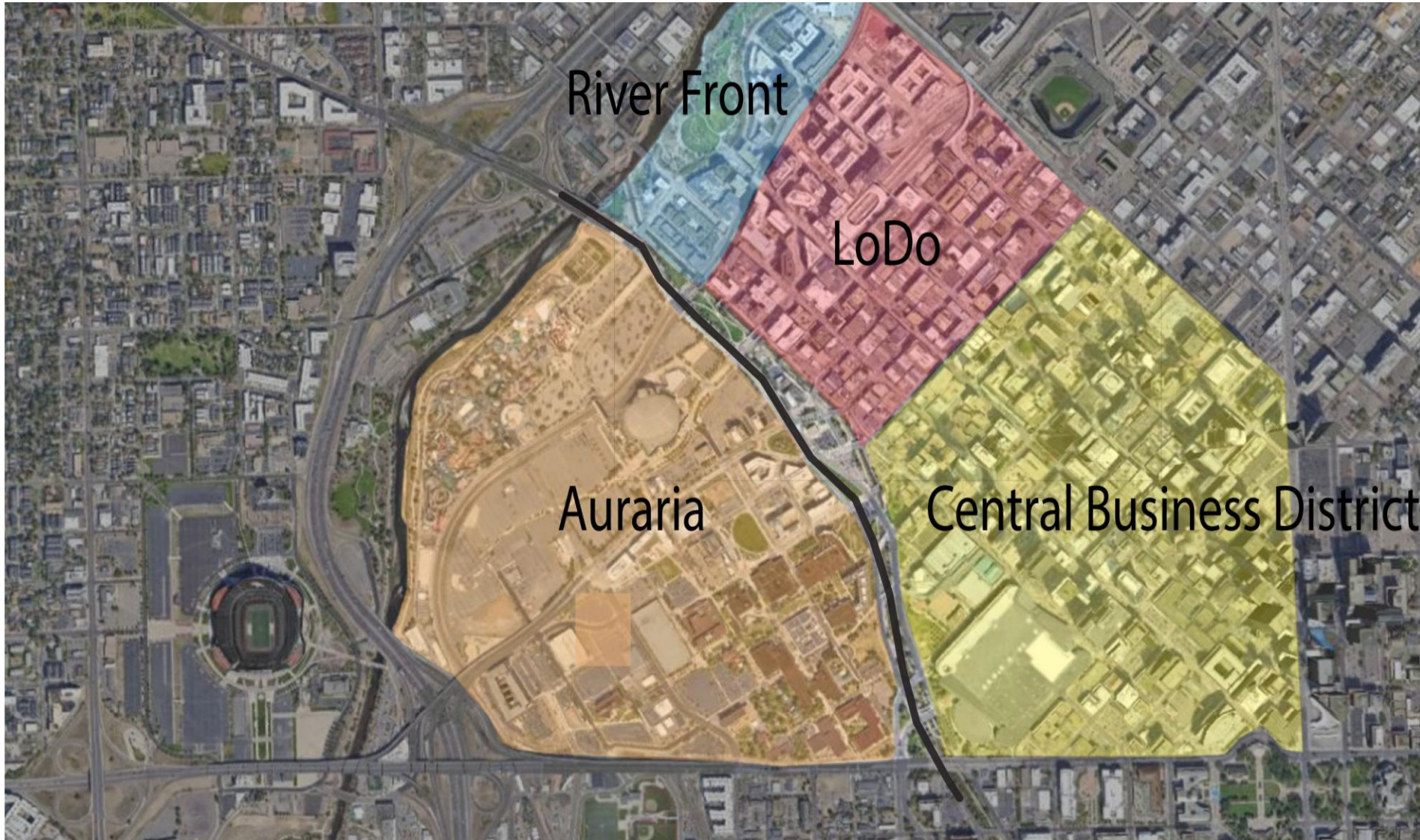
## **Vision (longer term)**

- Embrace the importance of the role of education to Denver's future economy, workforce, identity, and commitment to equity
- Integrate the Auraria Campus and the downtown
- Create mixed-use communities across Auraria, with priority to affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and tech partners

## **Action (now)**

- Initiate the change now
- Prioritize inclusion of indigenous peoples and displaced residents and businesses
- Kickstart enhanced safety and connectivity by reconfiguration of Speer Boulevard
- Optimize cross-connections between Auraria and downtown
- Revitalize Cherry Creek to the benefit of Denver's communities





Sherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
Denver, CO – July 2022

# Wellington “Duke” Reiter

# Introduction

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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## SETTING THE CONTEXT

# Context: Cities and CBDs

## Current conditions

- Covid uncertainties
- Workplace patterns disrupted
- Workforce challenges (health, education, other)
- Transportation systems are stressed
- Retail and office vacancy rates
- Housing affordability
- Homeless population
- Social services strains

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# Context: Higher Education

## Current conditions

- Shifting demographics, student profiles
- Access, affordability, persistence
- Graduation rates and employment
- Place-based + digital delivery
- Institutional financial models disrupted
  - Diversify income streams
- Need for partnerships
  - private sector, institutions, government

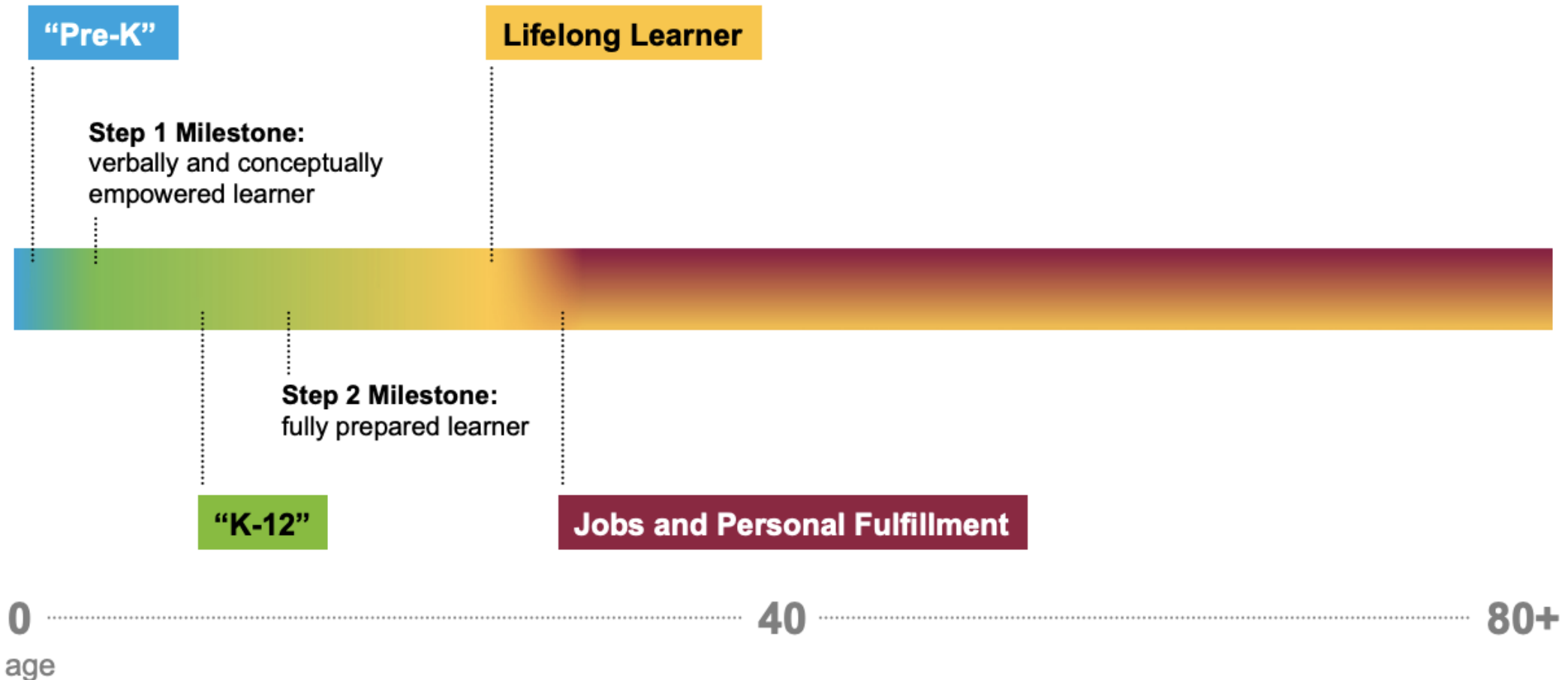
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# Context: Life-Long Learning

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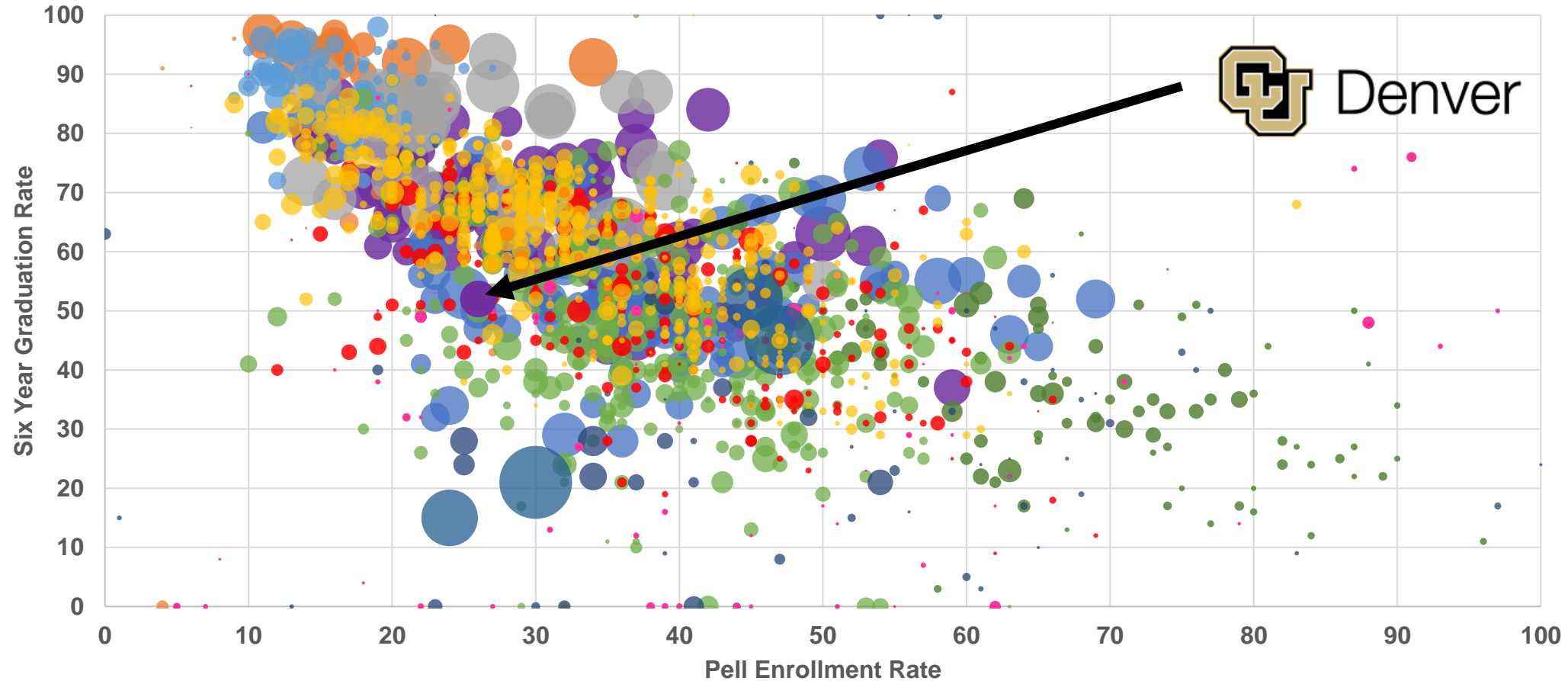
Coincides with the full spectrum of Auraria Campus options



# Context: Student Profiles

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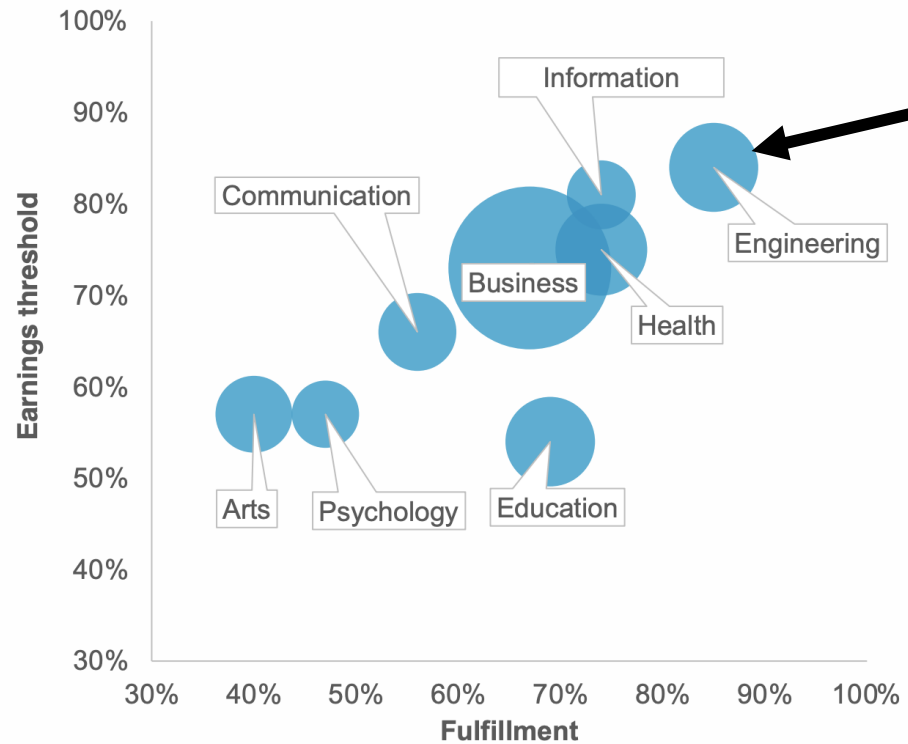
## Regional Scale Universities-Pell Enrollment/6-Yr. Graduation Rates/Total Enrollment



# Context: Student Outcomes

Key investments in the future

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# EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM

# Exchange: City + Campus

ASU- Phoenix downtown/Tempe examples

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# Denver Context: City/Campus

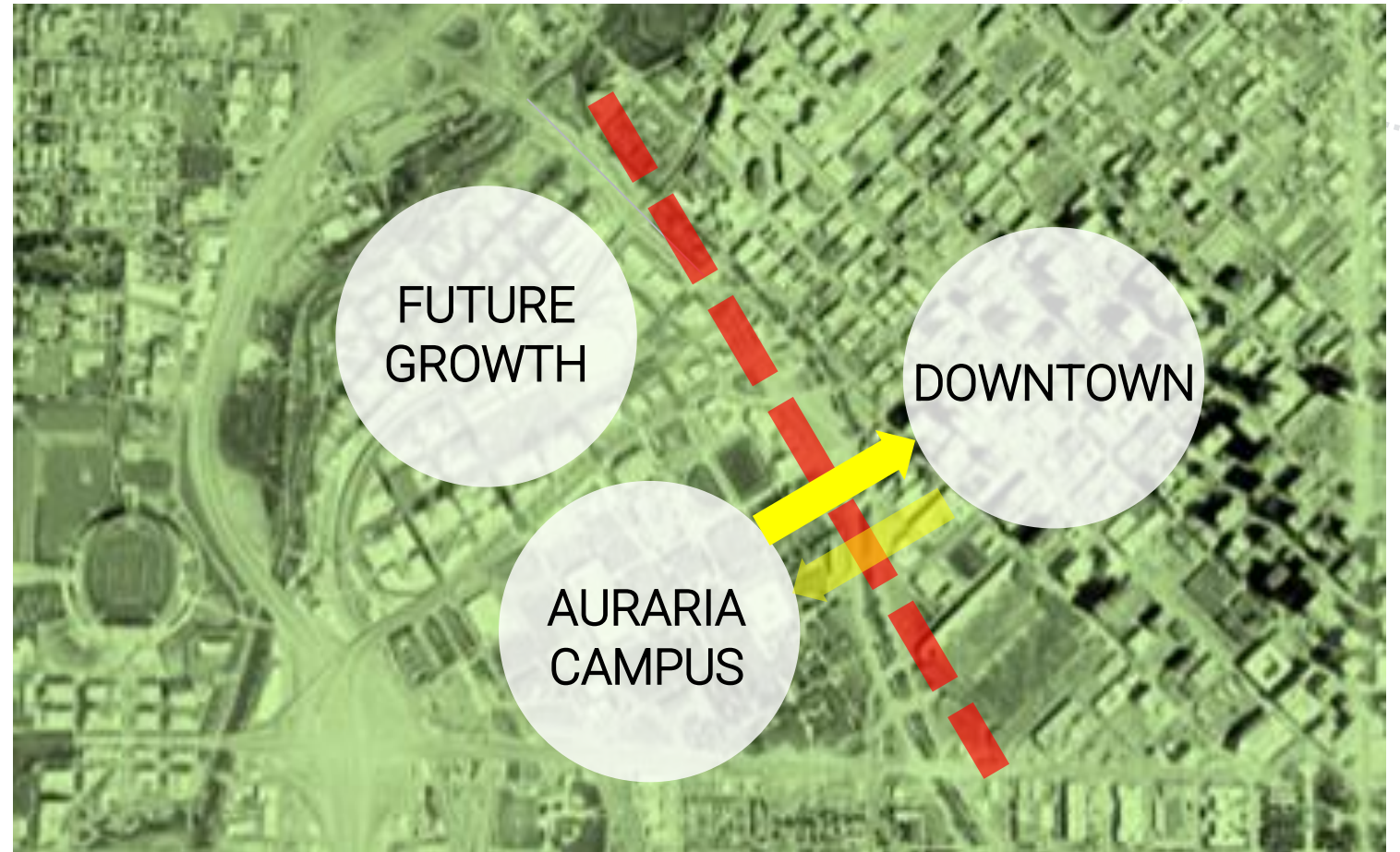
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## Major components and trends

**Downtown** - Accelerating the reemergence of the heart of the city must be a priority, addressing economic development, social services, tourism, etc

**Education/Auraria Campus** - Great cities invariably have a strong higher education component proximate to the businesses, entrepreneurs, and capital that help to drive innovation

**New Development** - The River Mile, Ball Arena, Empower Field, etc. represent 25K new residents necessitating thoughtful integration



# Shared Resource/Singular Identities

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Distinct missions and agendas

**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 (MSU)**  
Founded in 1963; MSU offers 200+ majors, minors, certificates & grad programs with a total undergraduate enrollment of 18,000+

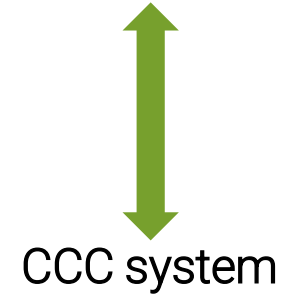
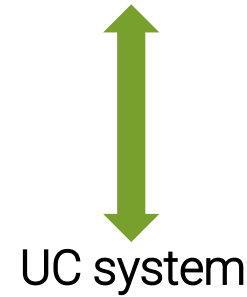
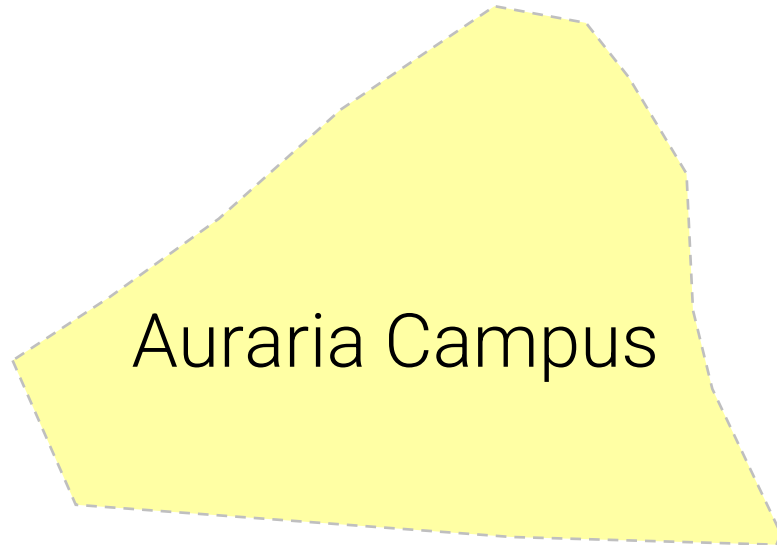
**University of Colorado Denver**  
Founded in 1973; 15,000+ students; 110 U&G degree programs; 30+ online degree programs and certificate and non-degree options



# Shared Resource/Singular Identities

Distinct missions and agendas

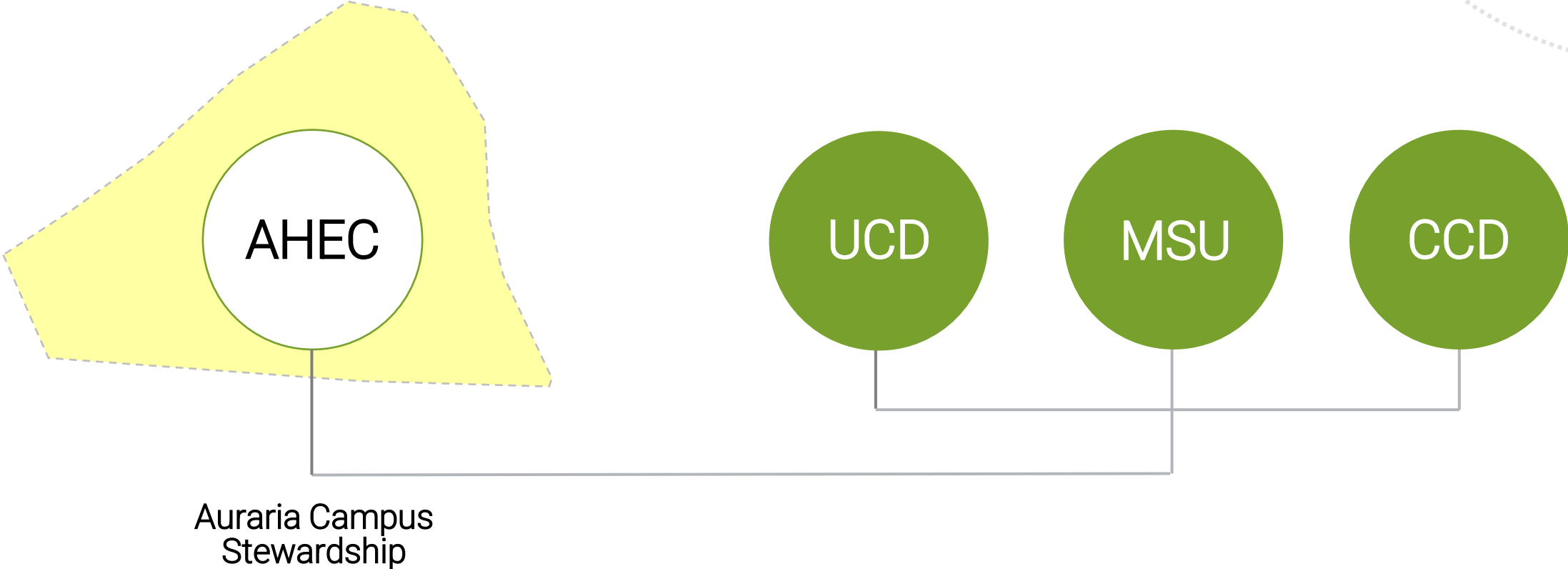
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# Shared Resource/Singular Identities

Central support + specialized operations

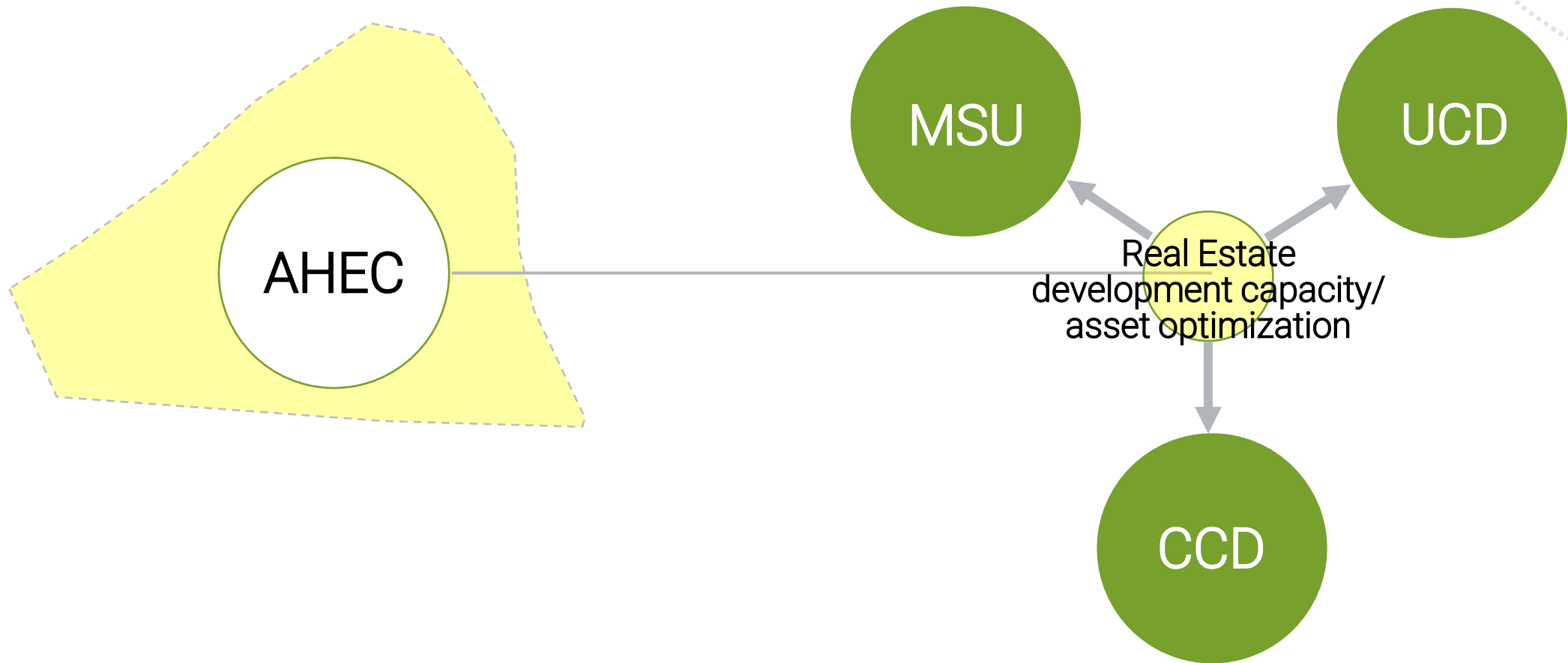
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# Real Estate Strategy/Development

Leverage the 77-acre resource for higher education mission

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# Definition: Innovation Districts

Rationale for increased real estate capacity

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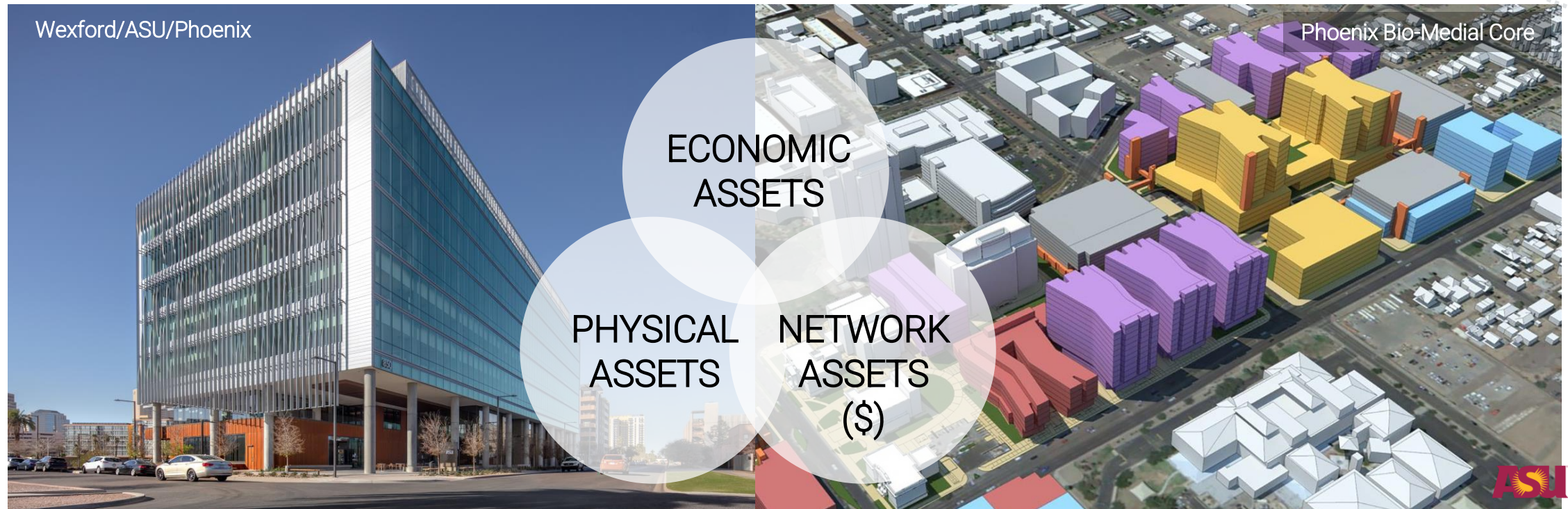


Photo Credit: Bill Timmerman



# Precedent Case-Study

850 PBC- P3 “spec” lab building

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- With Wexford Science + Technology
- 227,000 SF Multi-Tenant Biomedical Research Center
- ASU as a Partner with City of Phoenix – IGA to Develop 7 acres of Phoenix Biosciences 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



# Precedent Case-Study

## ASU SkySong Scottsdale Innovation Center

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- 1.2 million SF mixed-use innovation center development
- 42-acre campus in Scottsdale, AZ
- \$80M infrastructure investment by city of Scottsdale
- University Realty as a financial development partner w/Plaza Companies and city of Scottsdale
- ASU real estate development leases space for university needs (lessee)



# Precedent Case-Study

## Mirabella @ ASU Lifelong Learning Center

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- \$252 million, 613,000 SF 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
  - Negotiated ground lease of university property
  - Additional rent payment collection from developer



# Real Estate Strategy/Development

## Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Structure

- Allows public sector owner of land to work with private sector developers to build the improvements
- Private sector developers can manage the design, construction, financing, and long-term operations in accordance with agreed upon standards and guidelines
- Market conditions and the economy will help dictate the appetite of the private sector's involvement and the speed at which investment will occur
- Multiple funding sources for program management office (PMO)

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# Real Estate Strategy/Development

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Laying the groundwork for program success

- Add real estate responsibilities to existing state entity (AHEC)
- Manage the land and master plan 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 physical connection between downtown and Auraria Campus
- Collaborate with stakeholders (public and private) to set unified vision for reimagined campus



# Part II

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# Speer Boulevard/Cherry Creek/Larimer Street

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Gateway infrastructure and pedestrian amenities



# Speer Boulevard/Cherry Creek/Larimer Street

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Gateway infrastructure and pedestrian amenities





# A Signature Marker

Scale matters

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# Yvonne Yeung

# Reimagine 150 Acres with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Quality

- Create a model of 'Living Urban Campus' with 15-min walkable complete neighborhoods
- Unlock assets and optimize infrastructure
- Family-friendly amenities to attract and retain talent
- Tackle global issues with local solutions
- Climate change and community health
- Quality of life and affordability
- Urban live-work-learn-play



# 1. High-Density Mixed-Use Development at Stations

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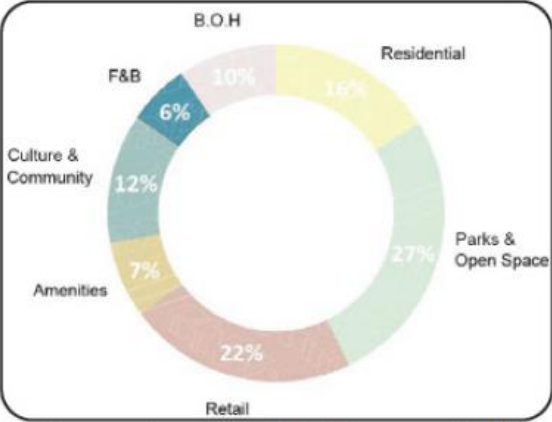
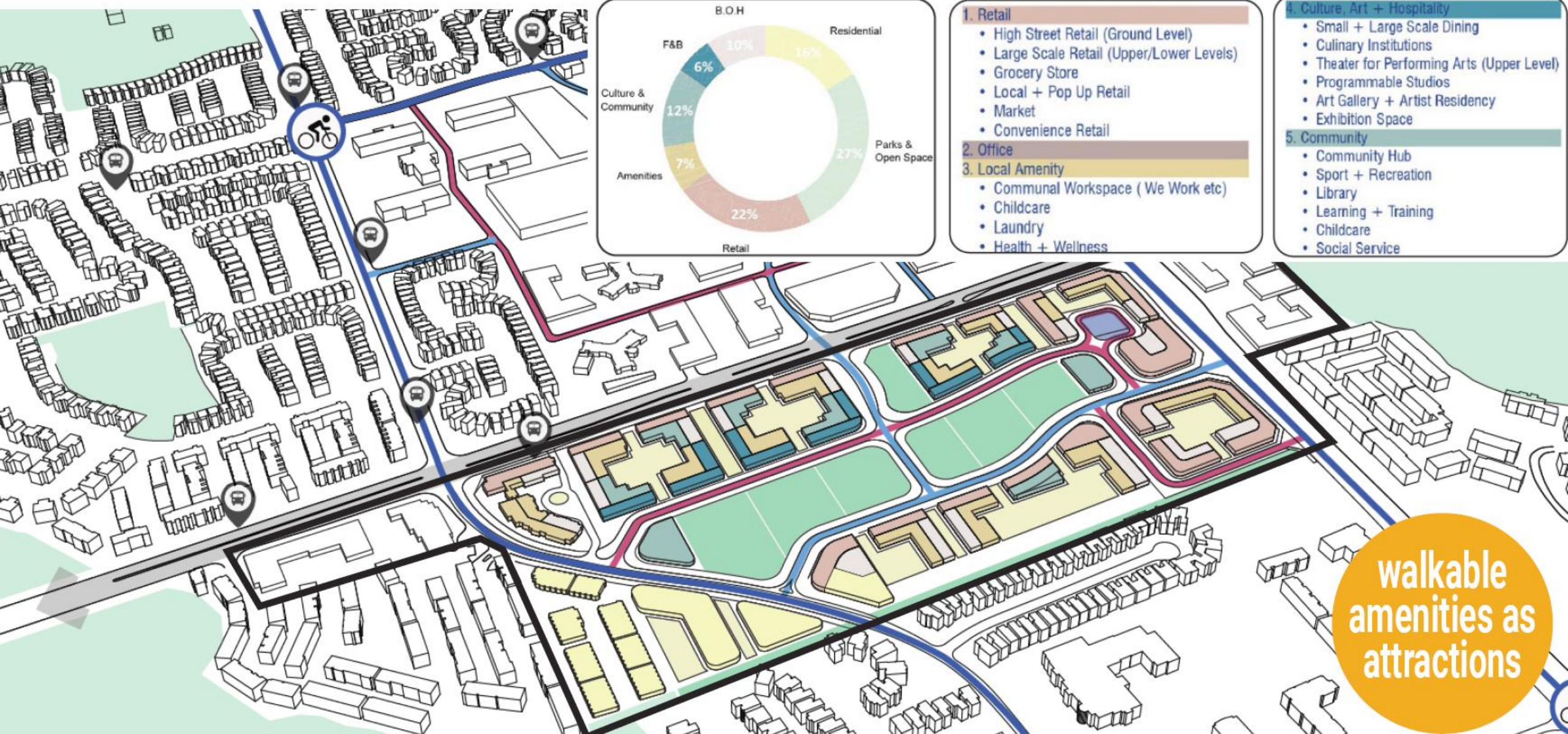


**80%**  
of area are within  
**5-min walk**  
from a station

**3-15 min**  
frequency  
of LRT trains

# Example of a 15-min Walkable Neighborhood

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- 1. Retail**
  - High Street Retail (Ground Level)
  - Large Scale Retail (Upper/Lower Levels)
  - Grocery Store
  - Local + Pop Up Retail
  - Market
  - Convenience Retail
- 2. Office**
- 3. Local Amenity**
  - Communal Workspace ( We Work etc)
  - Childcare
  - Laundry
  - Health + Wellness

- 4. Culture, Art + Hospitality**
  - Small + Large Scale Dining
  - Culinary Institutions
  - Theater for Performing Arts (Upper Level)
  - Programmable Studios
  - Art Gallery + Artist Residency
  - Exhibition Space
- 5. Community**
  - Community Hub
  - Sport + Recreation
  - Library
  - Learning + Training
  - Childcare
  - Social Service

walkable amenities as attractions

## 2. Interconnected Main Streets & Urban Spaces

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Extend DT  
Fine-Grain  
Grid & Mixed-  
Use Blocks

Lead by a  
Public  
Realm Plan

# High-Quality Walking & Cycling Facilities Along Mixed-Use Main Streets

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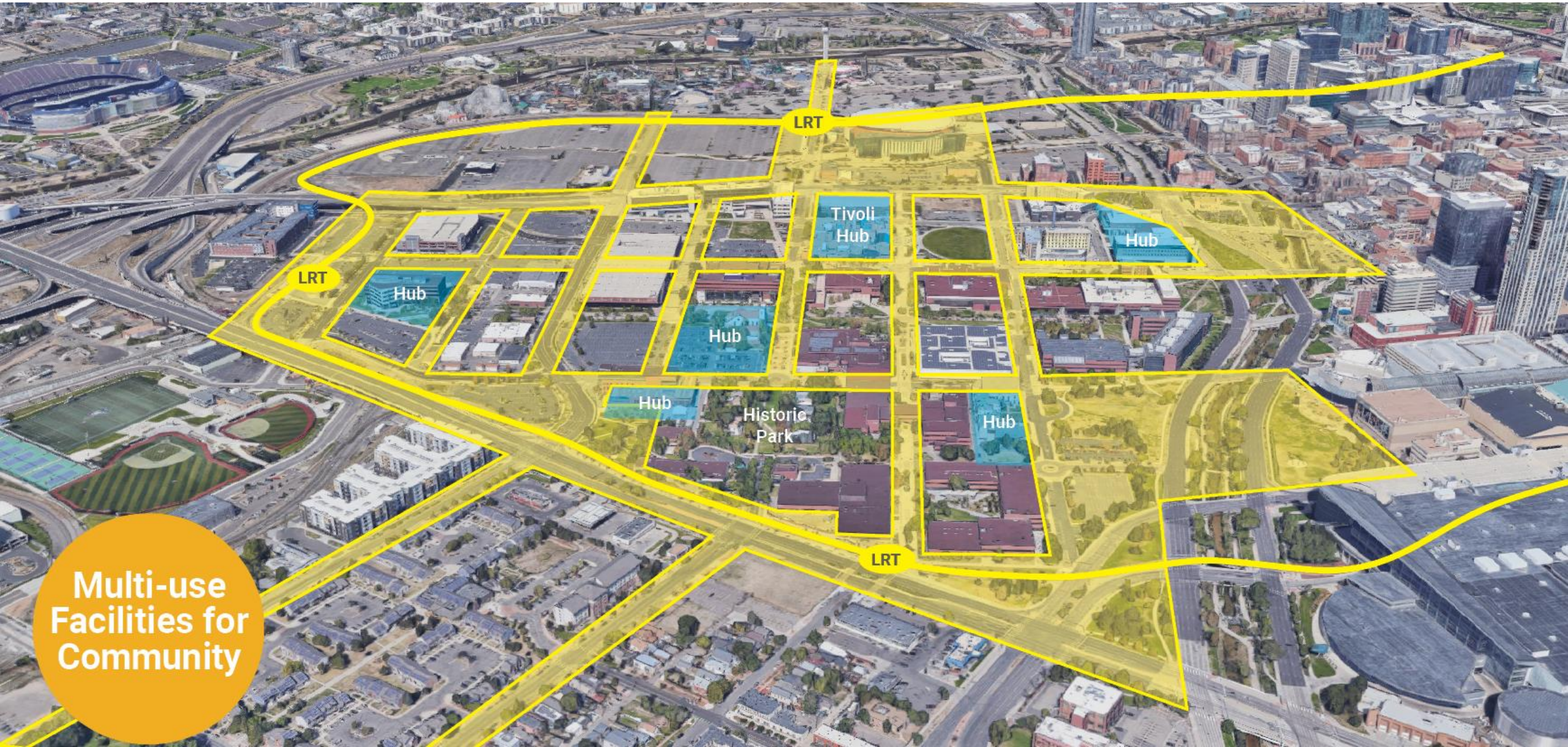


**Child and  
Family  
Friendly**

**Active  
Groundfloor  
Uses**

# 3. Community Hubs as Anchors

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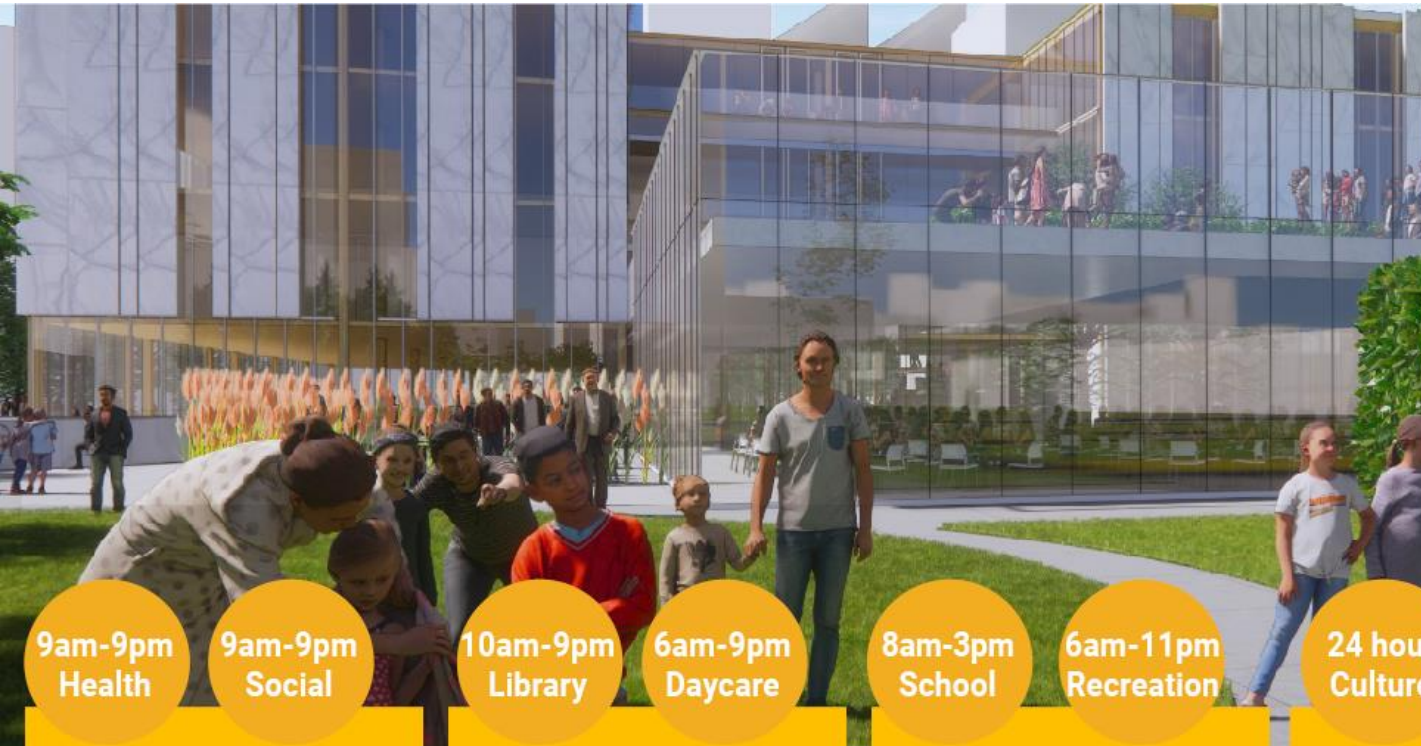


Multi-use  
Facilities for  
Community



# Example of a Multi-Use, Inclusive Community Hub

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9am-9pm  
Health

9am-9pm  
Social

10am-9pm  
Library

6am-9pm  
Daycare

8am-3pm  
School

6am-11pm  
Recreation

24 hour  
Culture

24 hour  
Tech

24 hour  
Rooftop  
8am-3pm  
Playfield  
24 hour  
Park

## Health & Social Hub

## Library & Education Hub

## Recreation & Food Hub

## Arts, Culture & Design Hub

## Technology & Innovation Hub

## Green & Ecology Hub

- Health Clinics
- Agency Spaces
- Exhibition Venue
- Meeting Rooms

- Elementary School
- Daycare
- Library
- Study Space

- Community Kitchen
- Culinary & Pop-ups
- Gymnasium
- Dance Studios
- Lounge & Event

- Performance Space
- Exhibition Venue
- City Design Centre
- Cultural Workshop
- Agencies Showroom

- Lecture Hall & Event
- Co-work Space
- Start-ups and Accelerators
- Mentoring Space

- Urban Agriculture
- Eco-learning Garden
- Outdoor fitness
- Green energy connections

# 4. Transform Parking Lots into Vertical Campuses

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**6+**  
developable  
mixed-use  
blocks

# Example of a Vertical Campus

TOP

330-bed residence

MIDDLE

Digital fabrication lab, flexible research facilities,  
administration

BOTTOM

Four academic departments:  
Schools of Nursing,  
Midwifery,  
Nutrition,  
Occupational and Public Health

**Design for  
Time and  
Space Share**

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# Examples of Tech-Friendly Facilities

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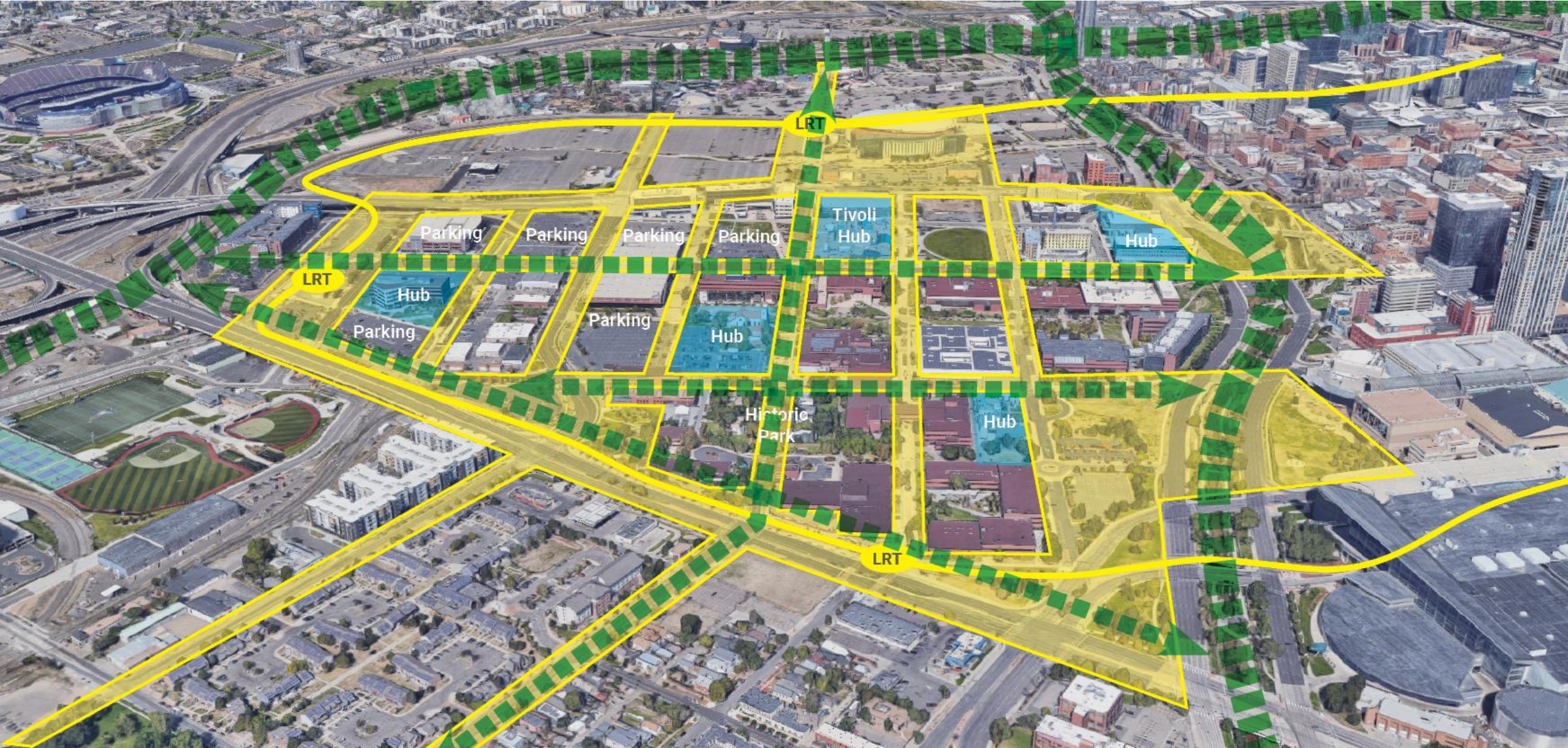
Carbon negative design with high ceiling

Biophilic design with indoor/outdoor programmable spaces



# 5. Connect River to Creek. Grow an Urban Forest

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# 6. 'Living Digital Twin' to Report on Sustainability

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**4<sup>th</sup>**  
most sustainable  
city in the  
world in 2020

**LEED**  
Platinum  
certified citywide  
in 2019

**Net-Zero**  
energy by 2025  
in Denver

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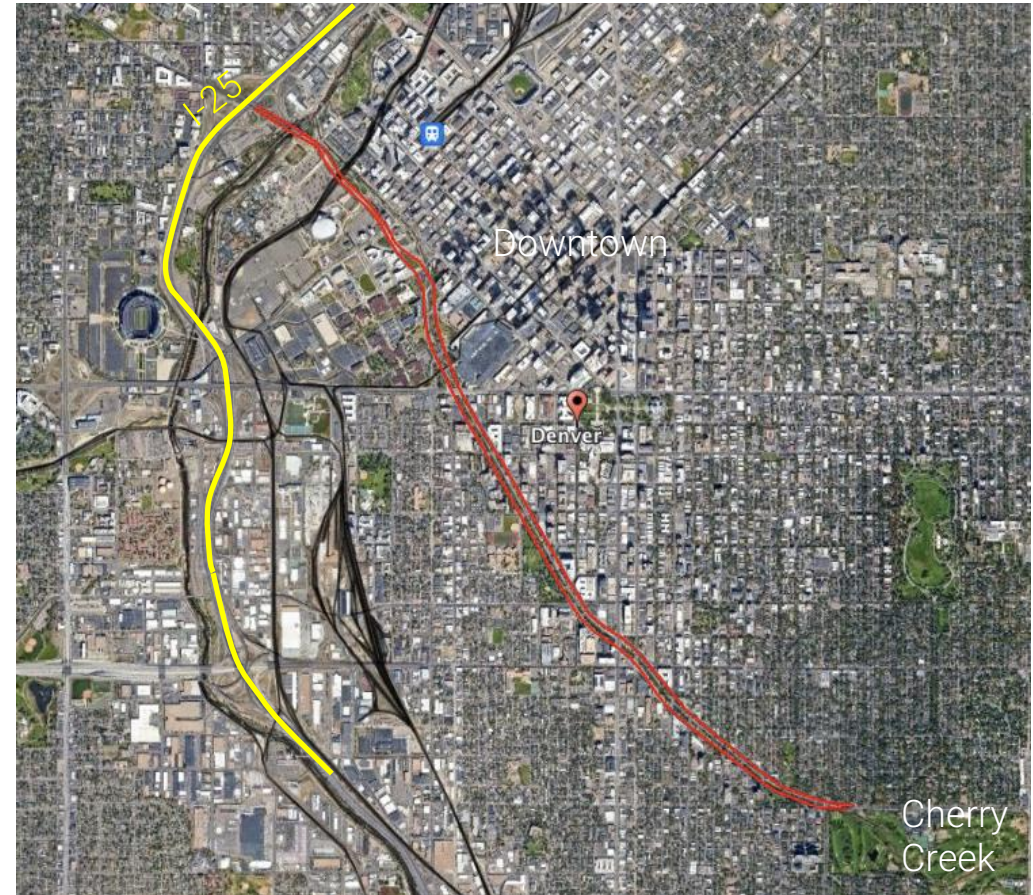
# Ross Tilghman

# Speer Boulevard's Role

A Special and important route

- A rare radial route
- Links key districts – downtown, Cherry Creek
- I-25 access
- Gateway to downtown from I-25 but also backdoor from Colfax

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# Speer Boulevard's Use

## A busy street

- 50,000 to 60,000 daily vehicles
- Access to downtown primarily at Blake/Market
- Unclear how much traffic is through traffic, how much turns
- Speeding is routine above 35 mph limit, but undocumented
- Relatively few pedestrians crossing compared to surrounding population

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# Speer Boulevard's Character

Very wide

- 8 lanes + up to 3 turn lanes
- One of the widest streets in Denver
- Other busy streets, e.g., Federal and Colorado, have 6 lanes and carry more traffic (50,000 to 72,000 daily vehicles)
- 15 crosswalks at 10 intersections over 1.1 miles
  - Ample number of crossings but daunting!

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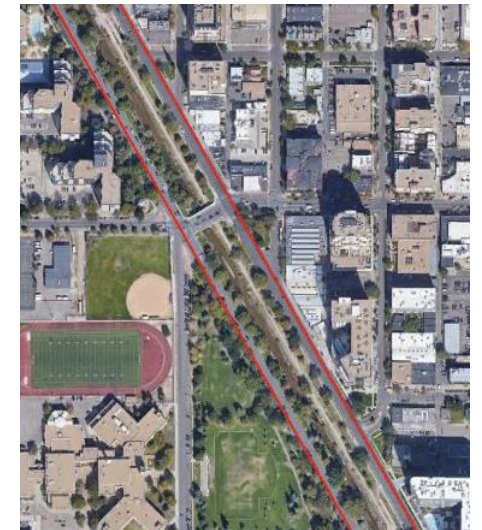


# Speer Boulevard's Character

## History and aesthetics

- Follows creek as people have done for hundreds of years
- Offers compelling views of downtown and of the mountains
- Despite changes from City Beautiful boulevard design, Speer remains a swath of green landscape through downtown
- Corridor width varies from about 250 feet to 570 feet, quite different to segment south of Colfax that averages 250 feet wide

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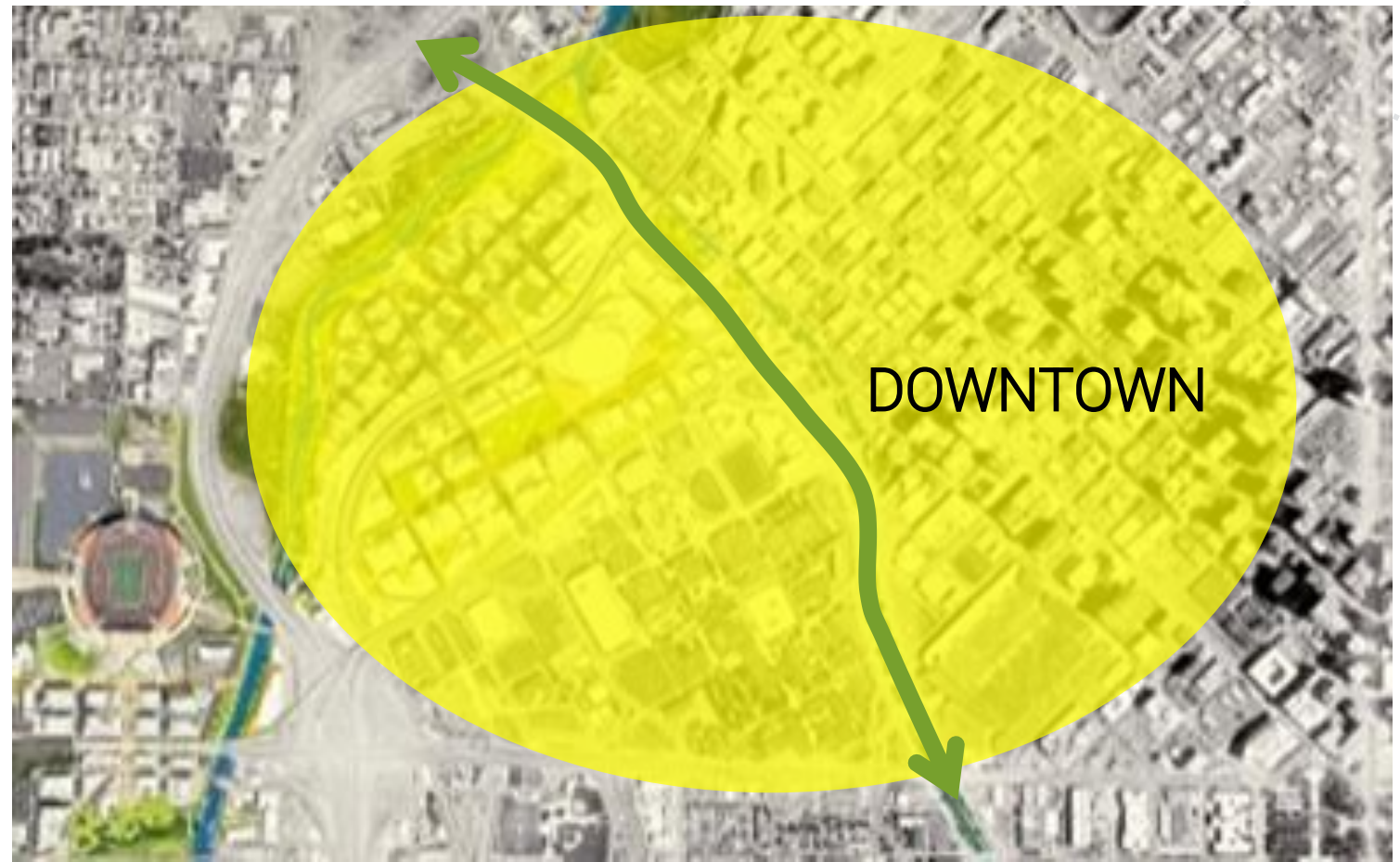


# The Larger Context

A central feature

- Speer runs through midst of expanded downtown

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# Pedestrian Experience

Long and awkward

- Few reasons to cross Speer corridor
  - Campus activity
  - Transit (LRT)
  - Arena events
  - Cherry Creek trail access
- Steely Determination required!
  - Long distance – up to 570 feet
  - Long time – can be 4 to 5 minutes
  - Traffic volume, speed, noise
  - No weather protection
- Few visual attractions or clues
- Awkward crossing designs

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# Speer Boulevard Summary

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- Speer's current configuration, traffic and adjacent property condition is incompatible with a successful, walkable downtown



# Creating a Better Urban Context

## Development and design

- A more vibrant AHEC campus with mixed-use development and public programming
  - Generates more pedestrian traffic to central business district and campus
- Create stronger visual attractions to campus for pedestrians
- Revamp Performing Arts Center and Convention Center to front Speer Boulevard

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# Creating a Better Urban Context

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## The new Speer Boulevard

- Shrink Speer Boulevard to 6 lanes with surface bike lanes and modest median
  - Consistent with traffic volumes, other major city streets
  - Gains approximately 130 feet depth for open space/buildings
- Shift creek to east side of roadway
  - Creates urban edge along campus
  - Enhances open space near creek and allows buildings on east side
  - Gives better new front door to Performing Arts Center & Convention Center



# Creating a Better Urban Context

## New street character

- Narrow lanes to 10 feet to 11 feet
- Reduce speed limit to 25 mph
- Eliminate separate right-turn lanes that cut corners
- Create perception of narrower street with protected bike lanes and landscaping
- Apply to both Speer Boulevard and Auraria Parkway

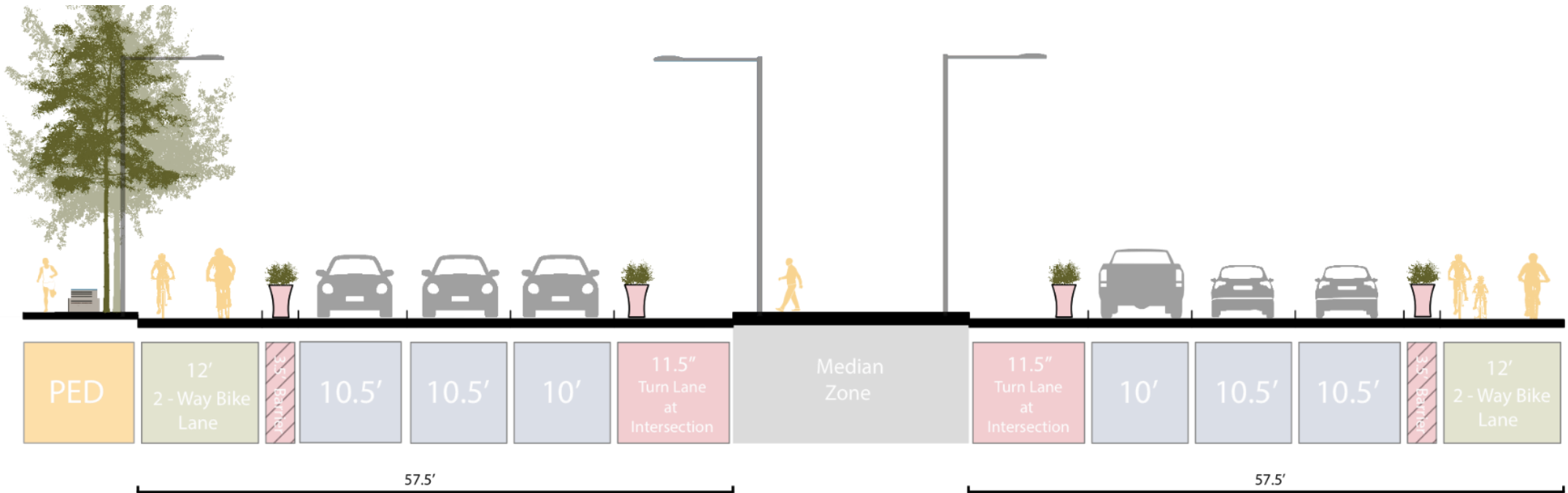
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# Testing the Plan Now

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- Test the 6-lane plan within existing curbs now
  - Use temporary barriers to create bike lanes
  - Temporary barriers can also block the existing inside lane, except at intersections



# Refining the Plan

## Monitoring and learning

- Monitor traffic, pedestrian and cyclist behavior
- Apply lessons learned to improve the new street's plan
- Use transportation modeling to test alternate intersections, such as roundabouts, for traffic calming and lane reduction potential
- Roundabouts may help solve the challenge of redundant street segments at Wazee/Blake/Speer Boulevard
- 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

# Additional Supportive Actions

Collaborative and inclusive planning

- Expand geographic scope of downtown planning to include west side of Speer Boulevard
- Revise zoning requirements for parking to set maximums – the single greatest tool to boost transit/walking/cycling
- Review campus transportation benefits to maximize access to transit for users (e.g., automatic universal transit pass)
- Strengthen existing planning collaboration among all agencies, departments and partners

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Sherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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# Ryan Cambridge

# History

Rich, but complicated history of one of Denver's oldest neighborhoods

- Members of the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes of indigenous peoples inhabited the area for hundreds of years prior to the platting of Denver's earliest neighborhoods in 1859
- In 1907, floodwalls were constructed along both sides of Cherry Creek and remain today
- Speer Boulevard, designed by famed landscape architect George Kessler, was also constructed in 1907

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# Existing Conditions

## Key opportunities

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Water access



Land under public control (73 acres)



Cherry Creek Trail corridor



“Cool” environment



Existing bridges/structures



Activating partners

# Existing Conditions

## Key challenges

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Channelized creek



Difficult to access



Perception of safety



Trail congestion



Lack of activating uses/destinations



General maintenance



# Vision

## What we heard

- High-quality greenspaces are critical to the future of downtown and should serve to connect, not divide
- Cherry Creek area is well-loved because of its unique environment and access to water but is under leveraged
- Greenspaces must be programmed in a way that they meet the needs of existing downtown residents/visitors/workers AND attract new ones
- Flood control capacities/functions must be retained, but can be a combination of different solutions

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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Central Park, New York, NY

# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 1. The Cherry Creek Cultural Corridor

- Embrace the Cherry Creek alignment as a Cultural Corridor that celebrates the history and impact of the corridor and its various people groups
- Tool to educate, advocate, and honor

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
Denver, CO – July 2022



Riverside Promenade, Indianapolis, IN (Photo courtesy of Browning Day)

# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 2. Infrastructure AND amenity!

- Retain or increase capacity
- Naturalize the creek alignment to allow for both slow and fast-moving water
- Embrace alternative “wall” solutions which activate and/or improve the aesthetic/scale of the pedestrian environment
- Capture and treat stormwater runoff before it enters the creek
- Integrate flood resilient structures and amenities

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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Historic 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Park, Atlanta, GA

# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 3. A tool for resiliency

- Leverage the cooling potential of both water and tree canopy
- Re-establish native ecosystems that are naturally drought and heat tolerant.
- Anticipate the need for shade in key gathering areas and destinations (example: playgrounds)

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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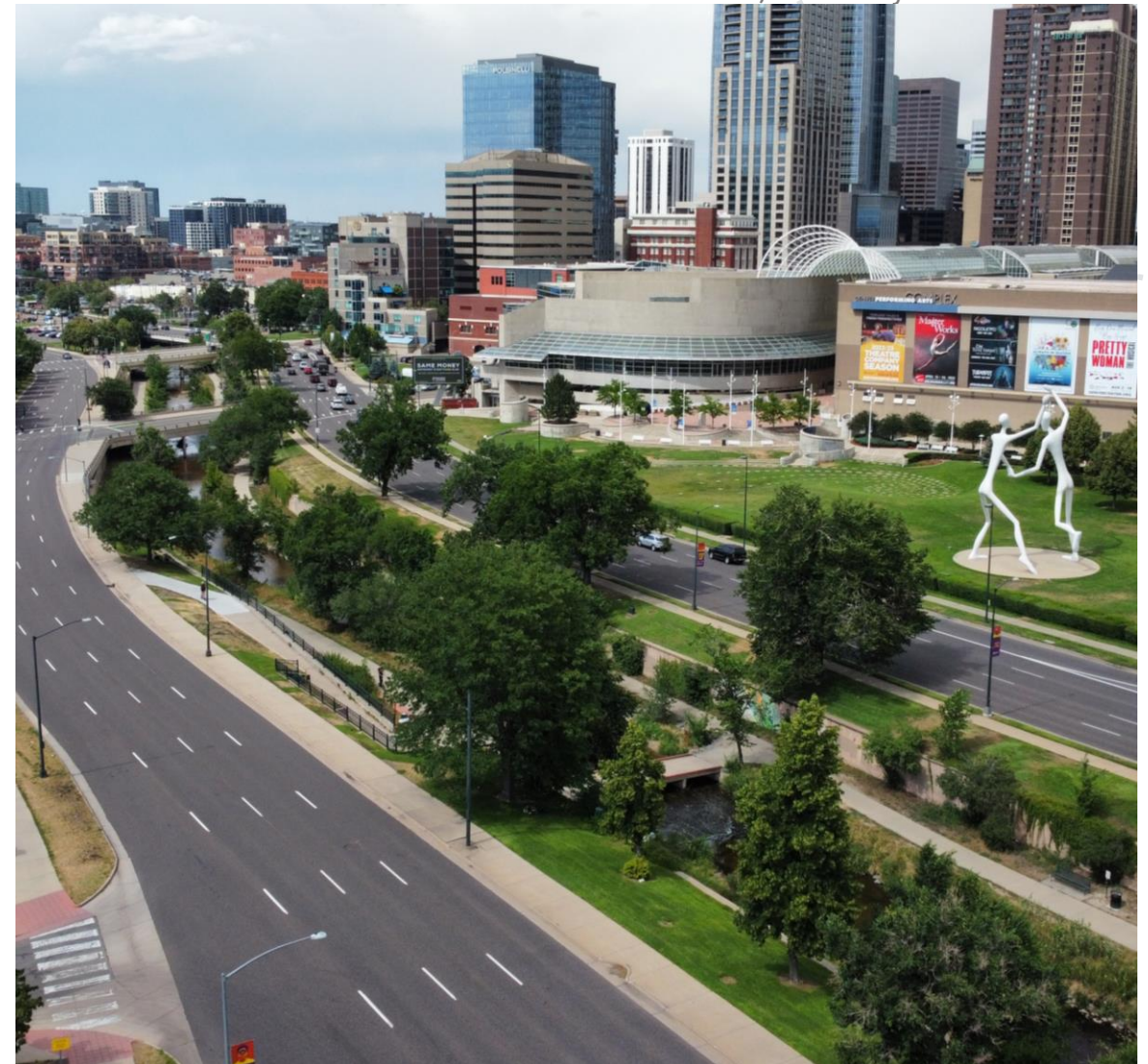
# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 4. Increase meaningful, interconnected greenspaces

- Ensure easy and equitable access at multiple points along the corridor
- Naturalize the creek alignment to allow for a series of terraced greenspaces connecting the creek to street-level development
- Create new greenspaces which extend over and under Speer Boulevard to unite the East and West sides of the corridor

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

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# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

5. Create new destinations throughout the corridor
  - Emphasis on meeting quality of life needs of nearby residents and workers
  - Embrace proven principles of placemaking to create authentic, unique, and activated spaces of a variety of scales at both the creek and street-levels
  - Explore opportunities to extend adjacent civic/cultural uses into the corridor both vertically and horizontally

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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Destination playground in Paco Sanchez Park, Denver, CO



# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 6. Increase pedestrian circulation options

- Develop a series of separated pedestrian trails and pathways suitable for commuting/cycling, running, walking/hiking
- Add high-capacity cycle-tracks to redesigned Speer Boulevard
- Explore opportunities to extend adjacent civic/cultural uses into the corridor both vertically and horizontally

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Indianapolis, IN

# Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity

## 7. Improve pedestrian safety (actual and perceived)

- Good maintenance and consistent activation result in both crime reduction and crime prevention
- Integrate selective safety and/or area lighting, especially beneath overpasses
- Increase the visibility into and from the corridor from the street level

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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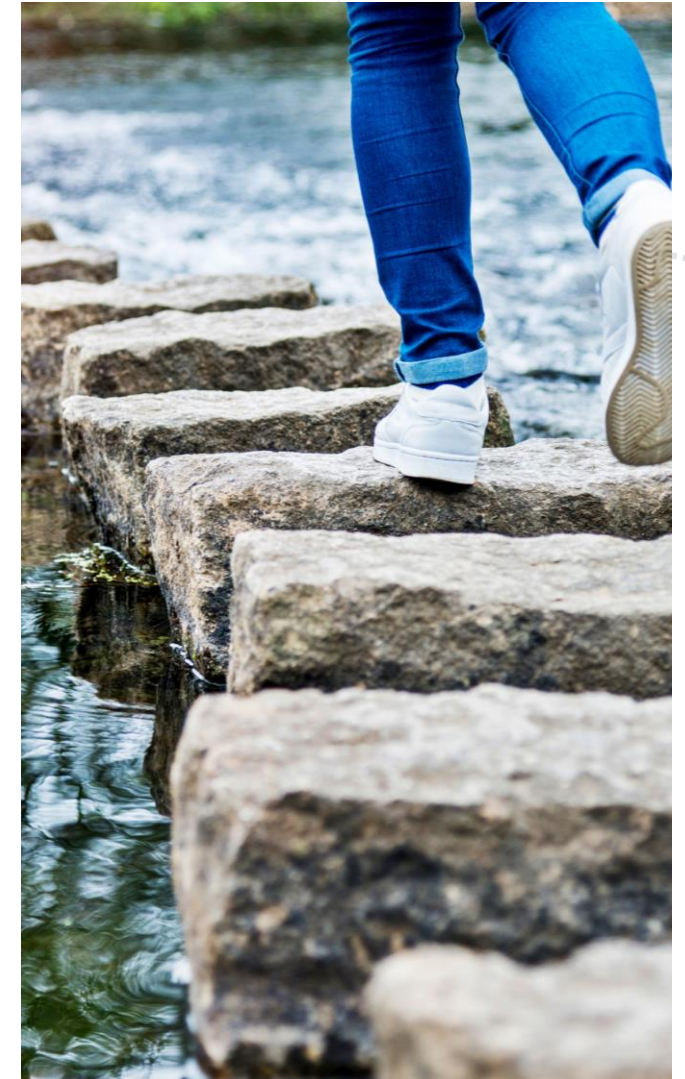


# Implementation Principles

Macro and micro

1. Develop a corridor master plan with a shared vision and prioritized phasing and management plan
2. Piggyback on adjacent projects and developments to realize economies of scale
3. Find partners for capital, operations, and activation – it will require coordination and cooperation
4. Implement fair open space impact fee structure
5. Don't leave anything “on the table”
6. Don't wait to activate!

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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# Implementation Principles

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard  
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Build awareness and advocates through immediate activation



Interactive, temporary art



Vertical gardens



Active walls



Urban "beach"



Pop-up events



Light as art



Walking tours



Nature playspaces

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Q&A

**Thank you!**

<http://www.uli.org/advisoryservices>