

Colfax Mayfair Business Improvement District
Feedback—East Area Plan Recommended Strategies
August 15, 2019

The Colfax Mayfair Business Improvement District (BID) was formed in late 2014 to create a better place for people and business through economic development, placemaking, safety and advocacy. The district includes 62 property owners and about 200 businesses on East Colfax Avenue from Eudora Street to Monaco Parkway, and in the Mayfair Town Center between Colfax and 14th Avenue, between Jersey Street and Leyden Street.

East Area Plan Process

We have been deeply engaged in the East Area Plan initiative since summer 2017, with staff and members participating on the steering committee, community open houses, small group meetings, on-line surveys and focus groups on economic development, design and small business support. We have found the planning process to be transparent, inclusive and responsive to input from our stakeholders. The planning team has proposed innovative solutions to challenges we've identified. And they are attempting the very difficult job of balancing diverse stakeholder interests to achieve shared community goals.

Blueprint Denver

The Blueprint Denver process noted that continued growth is projected in the City of Denver: by 2040, 200,000 more people are expected to move here, increasing the total population to 900,000. Most of the growth will be directed to high-density areas like Downtown, Cherry Creek and RiNo. The East Area is forecasted to grow by about 4,500 new homes and 3,000 new jobs. Community Corridors like Colfax Avenue, and Community Centers like the Mayfair Town Center, will accommodate much of this new growth here and around the city. These are the city's main streets and town centers, with homes, offices, restaurants, shops, services and entertainment for area neighborhoods.

Community Vision

We participated in the community vision for the East Area Plan: *"A collection of vibrant neighborhoods anchored by Colfax Avenue, Denver's 'Main Street,' where it's easy and safe to get around and where a wide range of people and families can live and work."*

As stewards for our district, we are especially focused on current plan recommendations to 1) support community-serving business 2) preserve Colfax character while encouraging new development 3) encourage mixed-use and affordable housing development near Bus Rapid Transit stations.

Key Strategy Feedback

To that end, we offer the following feedback at this stage of the process:

1) Support community-serving business.

Most people like Colfax for its mix of businesses and local character. Rents are more affordable to small businesses in older buildings or smaller spaces. And many of our long-time businesses would like to expand. We support modifications to main street zoning to allow for smaller or shared commercial spaces, along with a **building rehabilitation ordinance** to make it more economically feasible to renovate or expand older buildings.

2) Preserve Colfax character while encouraging new development.

90% of new development on Colfax over the last 10 years has been single-story buildings for national chains (retail, fast food, banks, etc.). This is due to restrictive main street zoning, parking and right of way requirements that discourage local investment. In addition, most of the 71 commercial lots in our district are small and shallow--75% are less than 20,000 square feet, most of which are zoned MS-3.

- We support a **small-scale development strategy** for the many small, shallow lots on Colfax. This would modify main street zoning to make it more feasible for development of buildings up to 3 stories (as currently zoned). Modifications may include reducing parking requirements, allowing for smaller commercial spaces and making right-of-way requirements proportionate to the project investment.
- We also support **sign code modifications** that allow for the iconic neon signage that Colfax has long been known for.

3) Encourage mixed-use and affordable housing development near transit stations.

It makes sense to concentrate people living and working near Bus Rapid Transit stations.

- Many people can't afford to live in the East Area anymore, or are afraid they'll get displaced, including young professionals, area workers, seniors and low-income families. And lacking a competitive transit option, they are driving to, from and around to work, home and daily errands. Local commuters, including current residents, are doing the same thing. If we don't plan for anything differently, this will all get worse--even without factoring in new growth projected for Denver.
- But if we create opportunities for people to live and work near robust transit stations, they have another option than driving a car everywhere. An option that is easier and cheaper for many trips. And that means less traffic congestion and ozone pollution, and more mobility choices for everyone. It also creates a more active main street and town center, enhancing social connections and supporting local retail stores, services and restaurants that are desired by the community. We want local business to rise with the tide, too.

We like the proposed community benefits incentive for properties near transit stations. With rising property values and high construction costs, this may be the only way to require things of private developers that the community has identified as needs, such affordable housing, open space, community retail, preservation of an existing building or stormwater mitigation. In order to best evaluate this strategy, though, we need a better understanding of many factors that affect a development project's feasibility, such as proposed requirements for parking, affordability, design and process.

According to Blueprint Denver, buildings should be compatible with nearby neighborhood contexts. By way of comparison, area planning on Colfax from Broadway to Colorado Boulevard, near higher density urban neighborhoods, is proposing building heights ranging from 5 to 12 stories. The National Jewish Hospital campus on Colfax and Colorado Boulevard calls for up to 16. The 9th and Colorado development, also a community center, allows for buildings up to 12 stories. Further to the east, buildings in the Stapleton regional center at Central Park light rail station could be as tall as 16 stories.

Colfax Avenue

- We agree that development on Colfax near transit stations in our district, adjacent to lower intensity residential neighborhoods, should be limited to a maximum of 5 stories, only if the developer provides a community benefit. Buildings should include step backs and designs that are sensitive to

adjacent residential blocks. The latter, already required by Main Street zoning, needs to be discussed in detail and the mechanism by which it would be required needs to be clarified for all parties. The community benefits list for this part of our district might also include small or shared office space and medical office uses, also identified as desirable in the planning.

Mayfair Town Center

- The Mayfair Town Center has long been envisioned as a higher density, mixed-use, walkable “village” with more intensive development in its core. It is located on Colfax and Krameria Street, one of the busiest stops on Route 15/15L. The 2006 Mayfair Town Center Assessment envisioned a vibrant area that provides options for shopping, entertainment, errands, relaxation and employment, while providing a focal point and identity for existing neighborhoods.

Building heights up to 5 and 8 stories may be consistent with that vision, only if community benefits are provided, and transitions and designs are sensitive to nearby commercial uses and neighborhoods. This also needs to be further discussed and clarified. If a development can provide community benefits at less than 8 stories, perhaps a height limit could be explored, rather than allowing the next zone category higher.

There are only 3 properties that could be eligible for the proposed 8-story incentive in the Mayfair Town Center, all of which are currently zoned for up to 5 stories and located between Colfax, Leyden Street, 14th Avenue and Jasmine Street. None are adjacent to neighborhoods zoned for single family homes.

- City Floral Garden Center is a 112-year-old local business and the last garden center in the City of Denver. It is a key anchor for the Mayfair Town Center and integral to our community’s identity around urban gardens, trees and sustainability. They provide seeds, tools and assistance in creating gardens for aesthetics or fresh food. The Mayfair Town Center Assessment noted that “City Floral is a signature retail use within Mayfair that could be enhanced and featured more prominently as a focal point within the Town Center.”

We request that City Floral be considered a “community benefit” as a strategy to retain this local business. Adjacent building transitions and designs should be sensitive to the operating needs of their single-story greenhouse.

Traffic and Parking

Bus Rapid Transit will provide an accessible, efficient and affordable transportation option to a great many people living, working, socializing and shopping in our district. It will be important to provide education and services to our businesses, property owners and prospective developers to help them adapt to a multimodal environment. To that end, we are exploring Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs with two local Transportation Management Associations and other Colfax BIDs. TDM programs could provide low-cost or free transit passes to Colfax workers and residents; assist businesses and developers with multimodal operational planning, manage parking strategies, particularly at BRT stations; curbside management and mobility hubs for bikes, scooters and shared care services.

The transit and area planning underway will be transformational to the Colfax Corridor. The planning to date has been comprehensive and responsive. We are comfortable working through more detail as plans evolve to the next stage.