

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014



Roundtable Background: Four roundtable meetings were conducted November 4th and 5th to inform the initial stages of issue and opportunity identification for Denver's Outdoor Downtown Master Plan. Seventy people participated (out of the approximately 120 people invited) in two-hour discussion sessions organized around the following topics:

1. Downtown Development and Economic Implications for Outdoor Spaces
2. Special Events Promotion, Organization and Daily Activation
3. Livable Downtown
4. Reflection of Denver's Culture and Identity in our Outdoor Spaces

The following is a brief summary of the main discussion points which captures the primary themes expressed in the four roundtable meetings:

Strengths and Weaknesses of Denver's Downtown Outdoor Spaces:

- Strengths:
 - Pedestrian and bicycle mobility is a major strength of Downtown and continues to be a focus for additional improvement.
 - Denver's brand is outdoor oriented and citizens value a high quality outdoor experience (sunshine, landscape views, sunsets). Focus is placed on active urban lifestyle, fitness and health.
 - The parks and trails along the river are special places.
 - Many outdoor events have a neighborhood and community building focus.
 - Denver has a vibrant art scene and iconic art pieces, such as the Big Blue Bear that attracts visitors.
 - Citizens enjoy spaces that express our pioneering, entrepreneurial, and playful style and that allow people to use the space as they want (i.e., Commons Park and the pianos on 16th Street).
 - Historic elements are retained.
- Weaknesses:
 - We have great connectivity but lack of places to sit, linger and gather.
 - There is tension between the transportation network and pedestrian/bicycle access to public spaces.
 - Trails along the rivers are not well-connected to adjoining areas.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014

- Vehicular transportation routes are significant barriers to public space access in a number of places.
- 16th Street Mall has great potential to be a gathering place but activation is challenged by shuttle bus frequency.
- Need for comfortable streetscapes that serve as more than transportation routes.
- Large special events are concentrated in a few parks and not dispersed enough to minimize negative impacts to neighborhoods.
- We need more year-round programmatic activation for daily use.
- There is a lack of spaces for dog owners, families with young children, and older adults.
- Human comfort and basic amenities in our outdoor spaces need to be addressed (restrooms, drinking fountains and etc.)
- The cultural complexes draw people but their outdoor spaces are not used enough.
- Stewardship and support by citizens needs to be encouraged.
- Perception and actual safety and security in public spaces need to be improved.

Trends in Downtown Denver that Require Anticipation of Future Outdoor Space Needs:

- Smaller housing units necessitate more shared spaces.
- Increase in families and seniors and the desire to provide amenities/activities to retain them in Downtown.
- Higher expectations for multimodal travel.
- As the land values in Downtown Denver increase we need to consider equity issues and affordability to be inviting to all walks of life.
- Activation of the waterfront is a trend that should be encouraged to continue.
- Auraria Campus plans point to a need for greater connectivity.
- Tourism focus is drawing people in for big events, many of which are in our outdoor spaces.
- Perception that there is an increasing negative impact of the homeless population on our Downtown outdoor spaces.
- People are increasingly using public space as their mobile office space.
- Technology and the digital world transform how we use the city.
- Civic Center Park is becoming more of an event space than a space for everyone all the time.

Opportunities and Challenges related to Using Rooftops, Plazas and Alleys, Parking Lots, Outdoor Areas Surrounding Public Buildings and Roads as Public Space:

- Privately Owned Plazas: Many of our privately-owned public spaces are not accessible for the public and it is not clear that they are designated public space. We have good hardware- but not good software; need to make these spaces feel inviting and porous. Need to address these challenges in existing spaces and planning for the future by addressing liability concerns, safety

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014

and security, maintenance expectations, design criteria, conflicts with surrounding uses, accessibility and welcoming appearance.

- Parking Lots: Private parking lots are poorly managed, look bad, have poor infrastructure, are expensive to rent as event space, and generally detract from our public realm experience. Most are not desirable to transform for public space use. Private/Public partnerships would need to be created. Policy and enforcement changes would be needed as well. Having said that, large parking areas such as Pepsi Center or Sports Authority provide opportunities for use.
- Rooftops: Weight limitations, accessibility (from street level and considering ADA requirements), lack of restrooms and other retrofit challenges. The Convention Center roof is large and could be an opportunity to activate. Rooftops are a desirable space to host events, could be spaces for active recreation or places to grow food.
- Streets: Need to activate streets with parklets. Need to become more of a public art space. Event street closures require a traffic management plan and other intensive procedures like managing parking meters. Street improvements are needed to make them more comfortable for pedestrians and have attractive treatment needs to be along more streets- like the named streets. Some streets act as barriers to accessing outdoor spaces (i.e., surrounding Civic Center Park) and instead could become pedestrian streets more regularly used as activity space. Very little hierarchy in the street network in the Downtown (most are arterials, so cars are prioritized over pedestrians).
- Alleys: Their utilitarian function doesn't work well for many types of events. They could be improved as linear parks and a cut through for people walking (this does present the challenge or need for mid-block crosswalks). A toolkit for how property owners might make alleys a better space for people would be useful.
- Bridges: Pedestrian bridges have transformed how surrounding neighborhoods connect to Downtown; continue to look for opportunities. Activate the old rail road bridges crossing the Cherry Creek trail and turn them into linear parks. Maintenance of bridges is a challenge moving forward.
- Trails: Cherry Creek Trail is a green connector but could it be activated as a gathering space? Trails could become linear parks activated with fitness equipment, play areas and more along the edges.
- Transit Stops: These spaces are currently overlooked for what could become vibrant and celebrated gathering spots. Need many partnerships to make this happen.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014

Opportunities for Outdoor Space to be a Catalyst for Development and Vitality:

- Downtown has many examples of past successes in parks and public space investments being a catalyst for private investment and providing great economic benefits (i.e., 14th Street, CCN and Commons Park). Public private partnerships have been an important part of the solutions.
- Outdoor spaces are part of what make us an urban destination for visitors and attract businesses to locate here.
- Some investments in public spaces are not paying off due to lack of activation and little surrounding commerce (i.e., Skyline Park).
- Curated commerce in parks would enhance vitality.

Challenges and Solutions to Loitering and Anti-social Behavior in Outdoor Spaces:

- There is a perception that this is getting worse and more of an issue. Quality of life and use of our outdoor spaces by everyone is impacted by this issue.
- Enforcement is a challenge due to the public relations issues.
- This is a systemic issue that requires partnership, continuum of care and many creative solutions; this planning project cannot address it alone.
- Activation of space is important so that our outdoor spaces are for everyone.

Activation of Outdoor Spaces:

- Spread activation and activities to all parks and public spaces instead of focused in a few.
- Concessions in/around outdoor spaces should be encouraged with this Master Plan.
- Need more infrastructure in plazas and parks to host larger events (add power, anchors for tents, water, restrooms.)
- Small group gathering activities and programs should be encouraged on a regular basis by making the permit process easier.
- No need for a separate tourism zone or spaces in our Downtown. Residents and tourists like the same spaces.
- Multimodal access and bike parking needs to be considered for more activated places.
- Need to solve communications gaps between residents and events hosts.
- Need an inventory of spaces to know what amenities and limitations they have for event use, programming and public use. If there is a database of contact information to make reservations for the use of parking lots, rooftops, plazas, etc. for events then these spaces will be utilized more for events.
- Provide more active recreation opportunities in public spaces throughout Downtown.
- Strengthen vitality of existing public spaces by better activating edges.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014

Policy Considerations:

- Downtown should have different policies for parks and public spaces than the rest of the city based factors of density, multiple modes of transportation, visitor numbers, crime prevention and number of events.
- As part of development impact fees consider how private development could contribute to a pool of money that either buys or supports public space maintenance and improvements. That would allow for the locating of these spaces in ideal Downtown spaces and create quality spaces that are used.
- Maintenance and operations budget needs to be incorporated into the planning of spaces.
- Explore how revenue (such as from event fees, parking fees, developer impact fees) could be earmarked for the Downtown outdoor spaces improvements rather than the overall City General fund.
- Explore opportunities for nonprofits groups to host fundraising events in parks without the revenue sharing requirement.
- Encourage the creation of parklets.
- Consider modifying zoning/urban design regulations to encourage ground floor uses that better activate private edges adjacent to public spaces.

Overall Ideas for Outdoor Spaces:

- Need a lot more little projects rather than one big one park investment. Little investments should work as a network.
- Location of improvements needs to be related to the neighborhoods and where people live.
- Skyline Park is an opportunity to become reenergized and reinvented.
- The neighborhoods need their own spaces.
- Focus on maintaining and improving the parks and public spaces we have now before we look to create new ones. Make them iconic place that provide something for everyone.
- Spaces need to be made interactive and encourage playfulness.
- Create linkages between our parks and a network of parklets.
- Need to have a healthy tree canopy and more landscape elements on sidewalks to address public health, improve the human scale of the street and enhance the “green” feel of Downtown.
- Need to create “friends of a park” for positive activation of parks to act as a support group.
- Engage the broader public in programming outdoor spaces, make them changeable and flexible.
- Need for strong political leadership to allocate funding and prioritize completion in a timely manner. A culture of cooperation needs to be created within the City to make these ideas feasible and the Parks & Rec Department needs to have a strong position. Grassroots support and partnerships are needed.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE KEY THEMES

11/17/2014

- Public spaces and activities should reflect the unique and authentic attributes of Denver's diverse culture and lifestyle.
- Need a well-locate iconic public space or spaces that reflect the essence of Denver and is/are inviting and accessible to everyone.

Roundtable Attendees:

Roundtable 1: Downtown Development and Economic Implications for Outdoor Spaces

Attendees: Amy Cara – East West Partners, Anna Jones – PUMA, Chris Crosby – Nichols Partnership, Chris Spelke – Perry Rose, Dorit Fischer – NAI Shames Makovsky, Ellen Winkler – Industry, Ken Schroepel – UC Denver, Gordon Robertson- Parks & Rec, Paul Washington – DOED and Ray Bellucci – TIAA-CREFF.

Roundtable 2: Special Events Promotion, Organization and Daily Activation

Attendees: Carol Hiller – Carol Hiller Events, Eric Lazzari – Civic Center Conservancy, Heather Camerer – PrideFest/GLBT Community Center for Colorado, Wendy Manning – Denver Pavilions, Roger Armstrong – CHUN People's Fair, Dean Menos – A Taste of Colorado, Renee Ortiz – Eventful Productions, Mike Madrid – Alley Advocated, Beth Ashby – Citywide Events and Film, Gordon Robertson- Parks & Rec, Joshua Seeberg – Denver Christian Market, John Hayden – Curtis Park Neighbors, Radhika Black – Larimer Square/Union Station, Lorinn Rhodes – DDP, Carrie Atiyen – Visit Denver, Nancy Cole – GTA, Kevin Scott – CCD, Nicole Jarman – HobNob Events, Adrian Mabry – RTD, Katy Strascina – CCD, Veronica Barela – NEWSSED, Susan Rogers Kark – DDP, Cord Rauba – DDP and Keith Pryor.

Roundtable 3: Livable Downtown

Attendees: Beth Moyski – DDP, Carl Meese – AHEC, John Maslanik – DDRO, Pete Citrano – REI, Ryan King – LoDo District, Ryann Anderson – BNSF, Steve Katich – JE Dunn Construction, Tim Wohlgenant – Trust for Public Land, Shannon Spurlock – DUG, Ivan Anaya – Zocalo, John Hayden – Curtis Park, Kayla Gilbert – Place Matters, Mike Madrid – Alley Advocates, Alex Pankonin – Assured Title Agency and Susan Fry – DDP

Roundtable 4: Reflection of Denver's Culture and Identity in our Outdoor Spaces

Attendees: Amy Fisk – Exponent Communications, Wendy Towbar – CCD/OED, Keith Pryor, Ryan Sotirakis – DDP, Michael Chavez – Denver Arts/Venues, Fred Glick – Wonderbound, Rachel Basye – Art Students League of Denver, Carri Atiyeh – Visit Denver, Brian Corrigan – Oh Heck Yeah, Josh Comfort – BID, Laurel Raines – Dig Studio, John Hayden – Curtis Park, Kristy Bassuener – DAM, Ivan Anaya – Zocalo.