

## Looking toward tomorrow

### Denver's Downtown Area Plan is moving ahead quickly

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The city of Denver's Downtown Area Plan, for keeping the central city livable and economically strong, is moving along faster than expected.

Major initiatives, including construction of a new state history museum and the \$480 million redevelopment of historic

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And we've laid the groundwork for the future.'

**Tami Door**  
president and CEO, Downtown Denver Partnership Inc.

at how to expand the 16th Street Mall's vending-cart program and perhaps creating a public market somewhere downtown.

"The progress we've made on this 20-year plan has far exceeded the expectations of our constituents. . . . And we've laid the groundwork for the future," said Tami Door, president and CEO of the Downtown Denver Partnership Inc., which oversees the 16th Street Mall.

The latest version of the Downtown Area Plan, adopted in 2007, was created by the City and County of Denver, Downtown Denver Partnership, and other public and private groups to keep Denver's core vibrant and attractive to businesses, residents and visitors.

One reason the plan is proceeding well, even during a financially challenging economic downturn, is that it was designed to be user-friendly, according to city officials.

"A good plan that's implemented with vision, goals and strategy is the best kind,"

Denver Union Station, are under way. And plans for other projects, such as upgrading the 16th Street Mall and rejuvenating blighted Arapahoe Square, have started. A formal ground-breaking for the Union Station project is expected in the near future, according to the city.

Along with large projects, there are lots of smaller efforts, such as planting trees along streets, looking



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Tami Door is president and CEO of the Downtown Denver Partnership Inc., which oversees the 16th Street Mall.

said Peter Park, manager of the City and County of Denver's Community Planning & Development department. "Sometimes clear vision that can be implemented can achieve more things faster."

#### Historical perspective

The current plan builds on the 1986 Denver Area Plan, which was a strategy for stimulating economic growth in the central city and neighboring areas and led by then-Mayor Federico Peña. The initial plan focused on big projects, such as making Lower Downtown (LoDo) a landmark district, beginning the conversion of the Central Platte Valley from a rail yard to an urban neighborhood and stimulating the development of more downtown housing.

The plan spawned urban-renewal projects, such as the conversion of the old Denver Dry Goods store on the 16th Street Mall to new retail and office space with lofts; other residential projects, including The Rio Grande Lofts and The Bank Lofts;

and a renovation of the Larimer Square retail district. Additions to downtown that weren't part of the plan, but which benefited from it, include the Coors Field, Invesco Field at Mile High and Pepsi Center sports venues, as well as the expansion of the Colorado Convention Center.

The new plan includes seven "transformational" projects, including energizing the commercial core partly by improving the "pedestrian experience" and adding to existing transit options. The other projects are transforming streets such as Speer Boulevard and Colfax Avenue into "grand boulevards," connecting the central city to neighborhoods next to the downtown core, connecting to the Auraria Campus, redeveloping Arapahoe Square and restoring the Civic Center area.

#### '1,000 small steps'

Through those projects, the plan is taking "1,000 small steps" to strengthen downtown's fabric, its authors say.

"The 16th Street Mall is the spine of

downtown, and the updated plan focuses more on the ribs of the spine," Park said. "That includes developing Arapahoe Square and the Auraria Campus, and emphasizing access."

That emphasis is pervasive in the plan, and involves making downtown streets more engaging for pedestrians through landscaping, widening sidewalks and improving lighting.

Expanding bicycle use, through bike stations and a bike-sharing program, is part of the plan as well. So is expanding shuttle bus service, via the Downtown Circulator between Union Station, Civic Center and the Cultural Complex that includes the Denver Art Museum. The circulator is scheduled to be ready in 2013.

As often happens with efforts such as the downtown plan, public projects — from the new Colorado History Museum, which is to be called the History Colorado Center, and Denver's Ralph L. Carr Justice

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Complex to transportation upgrades at Denver Union Station — pave the way for private development.

"The thing I love about Denver, and see in the community, is that citizens step up and say they're going to invest in the future [by voting for bond initiatives to fund projects]," said Rich Von Lührte, president of Denver architecture firm RNL Design Inc. "In the last recession, we passed the library expansion, Denver International Airport. ... Public stuff will be the catalyst for private development, will fuel the commercial market again."

Von Lührte has seen downtown Denver's evolution first-hand, as part of the team that worked on the original Denver Area Plan and, when he was with the Regional Transportation District (RTD), as a creator of the 16th Street Mall.

## Denver Justice Center, Union Station

Public projects associated with the current Downtown Area Plan that are under way include the new justice center on East Colfax Avenue, whose 488,000-square-foot, five-story Van Cise-Simonet Detention Center had a ribbon-cutting on April 14, and whose 317,000-square-foot, five-story Lindsey-Flanigan Courthouse is scheduled to open in July. The \$110 million, 200,000-square-foot History Colorado Center, at 12th Avenue and Lincoln Street, broke ground in 2009 and is scheduled for completion in 2011.

After several years of planning and organizing, the conversion of the historic Denver Union Station on Wynkoop Street into a new, transportation-oriented neighborhood for Denver kicked off early this year with the start of construction on an underground light-rail station at the site's west end. The light-rail station is the project's first transportation component; others will include accommodations for commuter rail, regional buses and downtown shuttles.

"This project is anchored by transit, with public spaces linking the transit components," said Frank Cannon of Union Station Neighborhood Co. and development director for the project. "Transit is the backbone for new residential and commercial development. In the last 10 years of real estate development in downtown, most of it has been in LoDo and the Central Platte Valley."

The private-sector side of the project got a boost early this year, when IMA Finan-



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Ryan Arnold, senior associate, tenant representation, and Patrick Bolick, vice president, tenant representation, for Jones Lang LaSalle, stand in front of the Greyhound Bus Station at 19th and Arapahoe streets. They are working with Greyhound Lines to sell the property and move the operations to a newer, updated location.

cial Group Inc. of Denver agreed to occupy the first new office building to be built near the station. The 100,000-square-foot office building is expected to break ground in early 2011.

## Arapahoe Square

Located northeast of 20th Street, Arapahoe Square is the last piece of the Downtown Area Plan to get started. The city is drafting a plan to redevelop this neighborhood dominated by surface parking lots, small businesses and homeless shelters as a dense, mixed-use area with housing and "innovative businesses," as well as social-service facilities. The redevelopment plan is expected to be finished by year-end.

A Denver Urban Renewal Authority study, completed in the first quarter, found the area blighted and eligible for urban renewal district status and possibly tax-increment financing for redevelopment.

One of Arapahoe Square's main redevel-

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Rich Von Lührte, principal at RNL Design, helped develop the 16th Street Mall in the 1970s.

# DOWNTOWN: Developers need to recognize opportunities

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opment opportunities is the area around the existing Greyhound bus station on 19th Street.

"Arapahoe Square has plenty of opportunity," said Ryan Arnold, one of the Jones Lang LaSalle Americas Inc. brokers working with Greyhound Lines Inc. in selling the station and finding a site for a new downtown station. "It's easier to get to the highway from there than some other parts of downtown."

Bus station owner Greyhound Lines has long planned to sell the obsolete building and move to a new, up-to-date facility at a better location, and has stepped up those efforts in the last year. Greyhound's new strategy nationwide is to make its bus stations part of transit-oriented developments on major highways — where it can lease, rather than own, space.

Greyhound considered moving to Denver Union Station, but opted not to.

In the future, the completion of the Downtown Area Plan will rely heavily on private companies' and developer's ability to see opportunity sparked by public projects.

Arapahoe Square's redevelopment, for example, will depend largely on developers who, as developer Charlie Woolley of the St. Charles Town Co. put it, see the potential there for new housing and commercial space that's less expensive than other downtown areas.

"It'll be interesting to see how the private sector responds as new public buildings are finished," said Ellen Ittelson, senior Denver city planner. "It's pretty exciting."



SOM AND RED SQUARE

A rendering of the view down 17th Street from the Light Rail Terminal toward Denver Union Station shows a vibrant and active mixed-use neighborhood and below-ground bus terminal, as envisioned in the Downtown Area Plan.