About the Urban Land Institute

**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

Reimagining Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard
What We Heard

- 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 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

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Executive Director of the University City Exchange (UCX), ASU
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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

**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
Wellington “Duke” Reiter
Introduction

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
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
Context: Life-Long Learning
Coincides with the full spectrum of Auraria Campus options
Context: Student Profiles

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

[Graph showing correlation between Pell Enrollment Rate and Six Year Graduation Rate]
Context: Student Outcomes

Key investments in the future
Exchange: City + Campus

ASU- Phoenix downtown/Tempe examples
Denver Context: City/Campus

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
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

Auraria Campus

UCD

MSU

CCD

UC system

CCC system
Shared Resource/Singular Identities

Central support + specialized operations

AHEC

Auraria Campus Stewardship

UCD
MSU
CCD
Real Estate Strategy/Development
Leverage the 77-acre resource for higher education mission

AHEC

MSU

UCD

Real Estate development capacity/asset optimization

CCD
Definition: Innovation Districts

Rationale for increased real estate capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECONOMIC ASSETS</th>
<th>PHYSICAL ASSETS</th>
<th>NETWORK ASSETS ($)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phoenix Bio-Medical Core</td>
<td>Wexford/ASU/Phoenix</td>
<td>Photo Credit: Bill Timmerman</td>
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Precedent Case-Study

850 PBC- P3 “spec” lab building

- 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

- 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

- $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)
Real Estate Strategy/Development

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

SIGNALING THE FUTURE
Speer Boulevard/Cherry Creek/Larimer Street
Gateway infrastructure and pedestrian amenities
Speer Boulevard/Cherry Creek/Larimer Street

Gateway infrastructure and pedestrian amenities
A Signature Marker

Scale matters
Yvonne Yeung
Reimagine 150 Acres with 21st 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

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
2. Interconnected Main Streets & Urban Spaces
High-Quality Walking & Cycling Facilities Along Mixed-Use Main Streets

Child and Family Friendly
Active Groundfloor Uses
3. Community Hubs as Anchors
Example of a Multi-Use, Inclusive Community Hub

- **Health & Social Hub**
  - Health Clinics
  - Agency Spaces
  - Exhibition Venue
  - Meeting Rooms

- **Library & Education Hub**
  - Elementary School
  - Daycare
  - Library
  - Study Space

- **Recreation & Food Hub**
  - Community Kitchen
  - Culinary & Pop-ups
  - Gymnasium
  - Dance Studios
  - Lounge & Event

- **Arts, Culture & Design Hub**
  - Performance Space
  - Exhibition Venue
  - City Design Centre
  - Cultural Workshop
  - Agencies Showroom

- **Technology & Innovation Hub**
  - Lecture Hall & Event
  - Co-work Space
  - Start-ups and Accelerators
  - Mentoring Space

- **Green & Ecology Hub**
  - Urban Agriculture
  - Eco-learning Garden
  - Outdoor fitness
  - Green energy connections

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard
Denver, CO – July 2022
4. Transform Parking Lots into Vertical Campuses

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
Examples of Tech-Friendly Facilities

Carbon negative design with high ceiling

Biophilic design with indoor/outdoor programmable spaces
5. Connect River to Creek. Grow an Urban Forest
6. ‘Living Digital Twin’ to Report on Sustainability
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
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
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!
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
The Larger Context

A central feature

- Speer runs through midst of expanded downtown
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

Crossing path 30% longer than distance across Speer

Urban Land Institute
Advisory Services Program

Cherry Creek/Speer Boulevard
Denver, CO – July 2022

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Speer Boulevard Summary

- 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
Creating a Better Urban Context

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
Testing the Plan Now

- 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
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
Existing Conditions

Key opportunities

Water access
Land under public control (73 acres)
Cherry Creek Trail corridor
“Cool” environment
Existing bridges/structures
Activating partners
Existing Conditions

Key challenges

- 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
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
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
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)
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
Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity
Recommendations

Big ideas for a big opportunity
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

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
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
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!
Implementation Principles

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
Thank you!

http://www.uli.org/advisoryservices