

Subject: Denver Downtown Area Plan
Word Count: 658

The AIA Denver Board of Directors supports and encourages city efforts, particularly in Parks and Recreation, Public Works and Community Planning and Development, to adopt agendas focused on the Denver 2007 Downtown Area Plan (DAP). Because of their unassailable impact on the quality, functionality and beauty of downtown, these three city departments must collapse bureaucratic silos and continue to work together as they did in the plan's creation to ensure its successful implementation.

Denver's historic City Beautiful framework—great parks, parkways, civic buildings and public spaces—has defined the quality of our civic realm for 100 years. Denver's commitment to quality informs the livability and beauty of our city, elevating Denver to national prominence and fueling the region's economy and growth.

Global trends in the 21st century indicate that if downtowns are to remain successful in an increasingly competitive climate for human capital and natural resources, cities must enhance the qualities that make them livable. Increasingly, people first decide where they want to live and then seek employment. Thus, our commitment to the goals and vision of the 2007 plan must be even more ambitious than the achievements that resulted from implementation of the Denver 1986 DAP.

Though the design quality of many of our major new public venues is exemplary, the character and quality of the public realm continues to erode. Through the Mayor's Infrastructure Task Force, community stakeholders have identified key reinvestments that must be made in downtown's public, civic and cultural assets, if we are to maintain our quality civic framework.

Manager of Community Planning and Development Peter Park reminds us that "The Downtown Area Plan resulted from the collective efforts of thousands of community voices. It defines the vision for downtown's future and includes practical strategies for implementation." While vision is a necessary starting point, Park also emphasizes the necessity of commitment by both the public and private sectors to fund the plan's priorities and willingness to sometimes change existing policies that hinder successful implementation of the plan.

Manager of Public Works Bill Vidal adds, "Past funding practices often present barriers to the synergies possible through more integrated funding approaches that address more needs more effectively."

Great cities are characterized by the beauty and quality of their public works—the streets, bridges, parks and plazas that are the stages for our everyday lives as well as the images visitors remember.

Greenprint Denver, the city's guiding commitment to sustainability, must instruct every aspect of public investment. This includes the literal "greening" of our streets, sidewalks

and parking lots through the introduction of a generous urban tree canopy, which will mitigate impacts of expansive paving and promote a more walkable downtown. The DAP envisions grand boulevards and great streets throughout downtown and the connecting neighborhoods. City policies must make this a reality. Greening downtown also means improved resource efficiency, alternative energy, green roofs and enhanced transportation options.

Manager of Parks and Recreation Kim Bailey points out that Denver has been successful using such approaches and cited Denver's commitment to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified buildings as an example.

However, without multi-departmental policy changes that prioritize these two areas—reinvesting in the public realm and committing to Greenprint Denver—successful implementation of the DAP is challenged.

AIA Denver looks forward to partnering with the City and County of Denver and the community in achieving the plan's goals of prosperity, walkability, diversity and distinctive urban design. These key objectives must be punctuated by the overarching imperative for Denver to lead as a sustainable, "green" city.

To these ends, the AIA Denver Board of Directors endorses the DAP's transformative projects, including energizing the commercial core, building on transit and beautifying Speer, Colfax, Broadway and Park Avenue West as grand boulevards. We call for changes to existing policies in order to promote collaboration among city departments and for a more thorough integration of public and private sector funding strategies, so that this ambitious vision may be fully realized.

Submitted by
David Tryba, FAIA
2007 President
The American Institute of Architects, Denver Chapter