

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

E-470 Corridor Commerce City, Colorado



Urban Land
Institute

E-470 Corridor Commerce City, Colorado

Strategies for Growth on the Northern Range

October 1–6, 2006
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute
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About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

The mission of the Urban Land Institute is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI is committed to:

- Bringing together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs;
- Fostering collaboration within and beyond ULI's membership through mentoring, dialogue, and problem solving;
- Exploring issues of urbanization, conservation, regeneration, land use, capital formation, and sustainable development;
- Advancing land use policies and design practices that respect the uniqueness of both built and natural environments;
- Sharing knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, and electronic media; and

- Sustaining a diverse global network of local practice and advisory efforts that address current and future challenges.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 35,000 members from 90 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of the world's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

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About ULI Advisory Services

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, partici-

pants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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The assistance of the city manager's office was essential to the successful completion of this project, and the panel extends its deepest gratitude to Gregg Clements, interim city manager, and his staff, especially Pat Green, chief of staff, and Leigh Ann Noell, executive administrator in the city manager's office. The panel also thanks Daren Sterling, city engineer, and Tom Acre, regional

projects manager. In addition, this panel would not have been possible without the efforts of the planning department, especially Chris Cramer, planning manager, and Steve Timms, city planner.

A well-prepared briefing book is essential for an excellent panel experience. Terri Brown, the coordinator for community planning and development services, and her staff, Lysa Gallegos and Angelica Chavarria, put together a high-quality book that was a rich resource for the panelists.

Finally, the panel acknowledges the more than 40 individuals who participated in conversations with panel members. As community leaders representing a wide range of perspectives on how the region should develop, their input was essential in formulating the panel's recommendations.

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Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

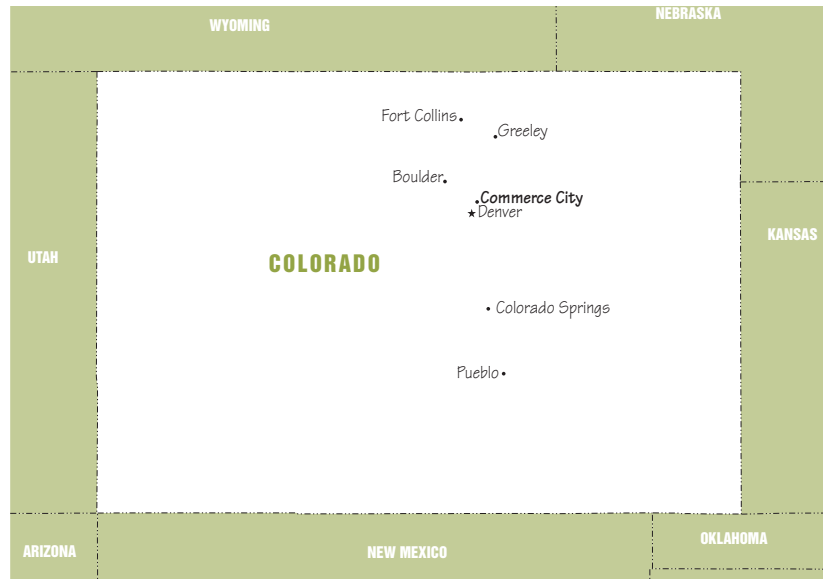
A fast-growing suburb located about seven miles northeast of Denver, Colorado, Commerce City finds itself at a crossroads (both physical and metaphorical). When it first incorporated in 1952, Commerce City became the natural choice for locating farm implement and trucking firms, oil refineries, steel supply companies, grain elevators, and mills because of its proximity to the former Stapleton Airport, three railroads, and many highways.

Commerce City's refineries and industrial uses, while providing a strong and stable economic base, set the tone for how the city was defined by residents of the larger Denver metropolitan area. Since the 1990s, the city has worked to create an image that moves past industry and emphasizes the municipality's quality of life and sense of community.

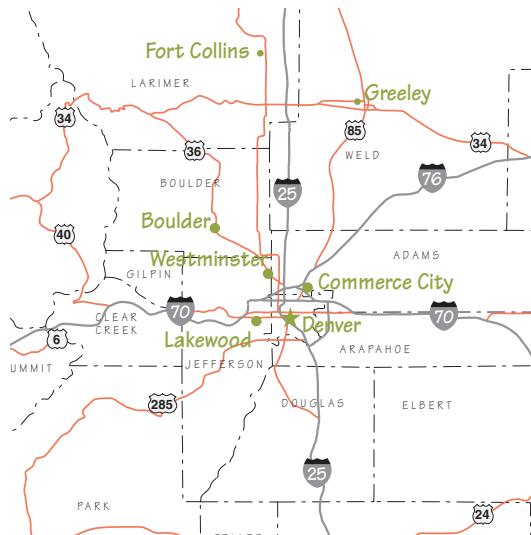
Today, the city is experiencing an amazing level of growth and change. It has grown from being almost solely a center for agribusiness and heavy industry and is becoming a balanced community of homes for all incomes and ages, sophisticated sports venues, and new parks at a scale previously unknown in Commerce City. As the city grows, tough decisions need to be made about how new development occurs and what form it should take. Fortunately, the city has many assets that make it well poised to seize its destiny.

One of the city's greatest assets is the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. When the wildlife refuge opens, it will become an invaluable recreation area and teaching tool for understanding and enjoying the wildlife and natural conditions of the High Plains.

Commerce City's proximity to Denver International Airport (DIA) potentially provides superb long-term prospects for continued growth and economic development that can, in part, serve the needs of the passengers who travel to and through



Location map.



Regional map.

Located at the nexus of two railroad lines, the former Stapleton Airport, and many highways, Commerce City was able to position itself as a center of industry for the Denver area in the 1950s.



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DIA. A proposed expansion of the airport will increase the demand for developable land nearby in the area.

Furthermore, Commerce City's leaders will need to remember that their marketplace for development is not just the Denver region but rather worldwide. ULI has documented how communities located near other major world-class airports (such as Dulles International Airport and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport) have experienced a substantial increase in the growth of land uses such as meeting and conference centers, hotels, offices, and entertainment. The city can take advantage of the opportunities DIA presents by aggressively recruiting such compatible world-market users and offering appropriate incentives for them to choose to locate in Commerce City.

The connection to the entire northern area of the Denver metropolitan region represented by E-470 and the regional arterial roadways—Tower Road, East 120th Avenue, East 104th Avenue, and East 96th Avenue—provides ready access from communities throughout the area to the existing and potential national and regional destinations that can be offered in Commerce City. Therefore, one of the city's greatest resources for the future is the large parcels of undeveloped land in the E-470

corridor. That so much of this land is already assembled into massive tracts under single ownership offers an unprecedented ability to manage and guide growth in ways most beneficial to the entire Commerce City community.

The Study Area

The panel was called in to determine the best land uses for the E-470 corridor. Specifically, the panel focused on the area bounded by the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and Tower Road on the west, 120th Avenue to the north, the Denver County line on the south, and DIA to the east. That area comprises approximately 10.5 square miles, or 6,720 acres of land. Of that total, approximately 3,300 acres are annexed into Commerce City, with the remainder lying within unincorporated Adams County. The study area is in the portion of Commerce City called the Northern Range (originally referred to as the New Lands in the 1993 New Lands Comprehensive Plan for the area). The Northern Range refers to the area northeast of the core city of Commerce City. It is also to the north and the east of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

The land in the study area is largely undeveloped, consisting mostly of historic farmland prairie. Significant on-site features include two floodplains—Second Creek and Third Creek—located in gentle arroyo depressions that carry stormwater northwesterly toward the Platte River Basin. These watershed features are the backbone of the Commerce City Parks and Open Space Plan and are to be retained as natural features in the townscape of the Northern Range area of Commerce City. As the city develops, they are to be improved with walkways and trails—linking the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge with Barr Lake just north of the study area. These localized systems, in turn, are to be linked with the regionwide 50-mile trail system encompassing the Platte River and leading into downtown Denver. In addition, the site has a shallow valley between E-470 and DIA. Low-rise development in this valley will likely not be completely visible from the western portions of the Northern Range. This natural depression combined with the adjacent land uses also creates a sound buffer for the site.

The study area.



Bisecting the study area from north to south, E-470 is a new toll expressway that when complete will encircle the Denver area. Within the study area, E-470 has three four-way interchanges at 120th, 104th, and 96th avenues. The expressway connects Interstate 70 with Interstate 25 and will serve as a critical regional transportation linkage as the northeastern quadrant of the Denver region expands.

The road network in this part of Commerce City generally adheres to the one-mile section grid of Denver. Not all portions of the study area have road improvements in place, however, and in no

areas are the arterial systems yet constructed to the standards that will be required to serve the new development ultimately expected here. In addition, a vital link to the regional network is missing. Tower Road is a critical north-south arterial, and some day it must be connected to Peña Boulevard if the regional network is to function effectively.

Regional east-west traffic is constrained in the vicinity between East 120th Avenue and the southern project boundary by DIA and the wildlife refuge. North-south traffic is similarly constrained to the Tower Road corridor between

Land uses adjacent to the study area.



Aurora and Brighton at the southerly portion of the study area and E-470. These constraints call for a careful assessment of development capacity and call for the ultimate provision of transit in the entire northern section of Commerce City.

The Panel's Assignment

The panel convened at the invitation of Commerce City to evaluate development opportunities within the E-470 corridor as a supplement to the New Lands Plan created by the city. Under the New Lands Plan, much of the study area was designated for mixed-use development and was intended to bring balance to a city experiencing explosive, but almost exclusively residential, growth. Within this land use designation, however, much room for interpretation exists. Furthermore, the high levels of demand for housing have threatened to overwhelm any of the other potential uses for the land

and therefore prevent future development that could take advantage of the site's proximity to the airport and to the growing needs of this section of the Denver metropolitan area.

In this rapidly growing metropolitan area, the study area presents many distinctive development opportunities. The panel's assignment, set forth by the city, was to define the most beneficial types of development and land uses, to determine an appropriate balance and mix of uses, and to identify specific and practical development strategies for the corridor.

Findings and Recommendations

The panel proposes that Commerce City embrace a "new paradigm" for defining and thinking about its future in a 21st-century global economy. The world is shrinking as communications technologies



Left: When completed, the E-470 toll expressway, currently a major transportation spine through the study area, will serve as a beltway system encircling the Denver metropolitan area. Below: The panelists tour the study area.



allow people from around the globe to share ideas and work products. To be successful in the 21st century, cities must take advantage of the opportunities created by changes in the global economy.

The panel proposes challenging and visionary ideas for land uses and developments that suggest ways in which Commerce City can position itself to take advantage of its cultural, historical, and natural context and of its current growth trend—to reinvent itself as well as to distinguish itself as the most forward-thinking, growth-oriented, and progressive community in the Denver region.

The panel offers support for these ideas by suggesting that market forces now at work will, in the long term, result in development opportunities that may not be currently apparent but that, if followed, can result in Commerce City's taking a leadership role in local growth and progress.

Finally, the panel offers suggestions for tools the city can use to attract development consistent with its new civic vision that will result in a mutual win for the community at large, as well as its landowners and developers.

The panel commends Commerce City for initiating such a valuable long-range planning process and strongly supports the continued development of the Northern Range as supplemented and modified by the recommendations suggested in this report. However, the hard work is just beginning for the people of Commerce City.

Implementing the plan will require an attitude of nimble flexibility, but without sacrificing the principles and policies that are proven to lead to the most successful outcomes. Although continuing the practice of approving subdivisions instead of requiring conformance to proven principles and civic goals is tempting, civic leaders must be wise enough to resist the current enormous market pressures to surrender long-term success for short-term gains.

Civic leaders must be strong enough to consistently resist proposed developments that would negatively affect achieving the civic vision. Instead, the city must work closely with those developers who are willing to buy into the civic vision by giving them a clear and certain process and by providing appropriate incentives that encourage

Tensions between the “old city” and the “new city” must be replaced by a new paradigm that emphasizes the accommodation of regionally and nationally significant developments.



projects consistent with the vision. Likewise, the city must be prepared to assist other developers in modifying their plans so they result in projects that extend the civic vision. Providing some preference to those developers who are willing to help the city achieve its overall civic vision and goals is not inappropriate, provided that all such relationships are conducted openly, publicly, and honestly.

The panel recommends that the city’s leaders in both the public and private sectors join in responsibility with each other to create working partnerships with those private interests who understand

and support the civic vision. Achieving success will require three qualities:

- The *vision* to see things that others miss;
- The *leadership* to convince others to join in achieving the vision;
- The *will* to maintain a consistent and steady course toward the vision despite pressures to abandon it for short-term gains.

The Context: A New Paradigm

Commerce City has a long history of regional significance to the Denver metropolitan area. The history and the industrial base on which the town is founded are at once a point of pride for the core of the community and a source of conflict. This fact creates a challenging hurdle for Commerce City in its efforts to rebrand itself as a life-cycle community where its residents can live, work, and play. As the city searches for a way in which to balance its industrial past with its hopes for a suburban future, it needs to understand the context in which these changes are taking place.

Before getting into the detailed presentations of market, development strategies, urban design, and implementation, the panel suggests using the concept of a “paradigm shift” to perceive the city. The existing paradigm of Commerce City pits the “old city” against the “new city.” The city is either a “sink” for industrial development and undesirable uses in the larger metropolitan area or it is a fast-growing community of new suburban single-family homes.

Ironically, the uses closely identified with the “old city”—the two major oil refineries, the extensive industrial and distribution facilities that serve the whole region, the waste transfer station, the regional landfill, and the old Rocky Mountain Arsenal when it was used as a munitions factory and a chemical manufacturing facility—are regionally significant and play a critical role in the overall Denver metropolitan area. Commerce City must move away from this old paradigm and toward a new vision of the city.

This new paradigm calls for the continuation of the municipality’s rich past as a place that accommodates *developments of regional and national significance*. Such developments, the panel envisions, are places that offer services that are critically important to the functioning of the entire region or that create a regional or national level

of attraction to them. If these new uses are destination attractions that draw in hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, the city’s image will change for the better and will be more reflective of the new uses rather than of the “old city” paradigm.

The panel has already identified two nationally significant developments in the area. The Denver International Airport, although not located in Commerce City, is already a major international destination. Also, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge promises to become a national ecotourism destination with many opportunities for a wide range of outdoor activities, such as fishing and observing wildlife.

Another example consistent with the new paradigm is the 20,000-seat Kroenke Sports Stadium under construction for the Colorado Rapids soccer team. When completed, the stadium will include 24 soccer fields and will have the potential to host other entertainment events.

Because major portions of the study area are buffered from the potential for normal land use conflicts thanks to the large areas surrounding the site—including the 27-square-mile wildlife refuge to the west, the 53-square-mile DIA to the east, the four-square-mile Barr Lake State Park and its related conservation easements to the north, and the one-square-mile Browning Ferris Industries,



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Like the rest of the Denver area, Commerce City’s economic past was closely tied to oil production.

The 27-square-mile Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge is at the western border of the study area.



Inc., landfill to the south—the list of potential development opportunities is quite long. Taking full advantage of these buffers, future nationally and regionally significant development projects could include large employment generators, difficult-to-site land uses, recreational destinations that capitalize on unique natural features, retail shopping destinations, and regional entertainment attractions.

While the range of potential developments is quite extensive, one portion of the development area calls for a very specific development pattern. The buffering produced by the existing large-scale uses is particularly apparent in the “hourglass” shape of the study area at the southern end. The southern area’s proximity to the entrance of DIA suggests the potential for a somewhat different set of users than the northeastern section of the study area. Development in this area should tar-

get business travelers and support the business and logistics opportunities created by having a large international airport for a neighbor.

The bottom line is that Commerce City has historically provided and continues to provide key functions servicing the critical needs of the region, but it should also seek out and site nationally and regionally significant developments on a majority of the study area. These unique uses could be difficult to site in other parts of the region, and they should be sited here only on the condition that economic benefits accrue to the city as a result. Bringing in these regionally and nationally significant developments can create opportunities to fund necessary infrastructure and to finance community development and place-making projects in other parts of the city, especially its older sections.

Market Analysis

The main focus of the panel's report is the concept of making Commerce City a regionally and nationally significant community. The city's history and image as an industrial center should not be forgotten as the plans are laid for the future. Changing the image of Commerce City will be achieved by embracing the elements that have made and continue to make Commerce City special. By creating a strong and identifiable sense of place, Commerce City can help overcome some of the market factors that might otherwise limit its potential in the short run.

The panel has examined market information at the following market areas: the study area, the Northern Range, the present downtown core of Commerce City, and the northeast area in the DIA Partnership District. In particular, the DIA Partnership study provides a metropolitan view with the "capture" for the DIA northeast district that is cited for this report.

Clearly, existing and proposed development projects just outside the study area will compete with projects located in the study area. How well projects within the study area successfully compete with projects outside the study area—and Commerce City's borders—and capture their share of projected demand figures will depend on how well developers and owners are able to respond to market forces.

Before getting into specific recommendations by land use type, the panel must state its belief that the United States and the entire world are at the beginning of a new era in commerce. This change is perhaps as profound as the introduction of the printing press or the industrial revolution. According to the recent book *The World Is Flat* by Thomas Friedman, starting about 2000, this change was caused by the interaction of a number of historic factors, including the following:

- The emergence of Internet and broadband technologies;
- The introduction of billions of people in China, India, and the former Soviet Union to the global marketplace;
- Changes from vertical to horizontal integration in business processes;
- Distinctions between routine functions (that can be outsourced) and value-added functions (that cannot be outsourced).

Given the conclusions drawn in *The World Is Flat* and the multitude of changes occurring in how commerce is conducted around the world, caution is necessary when applying local real estate absorption numbers at the beginning of this new economic reality. The relatively low levels of absorption in the Commerce City area may be altered because of new demands not currently anticipated. DIA makes the region particularly well positioned to benefit from the transformations that are creating a new global economy.

Residential Demand

Regarding existing residential projects in the Northern Range, 55 subdivisions are in various stages of entitlement and construction. Active residential projects constitute about 7,800 acres, al-



Since the 1990s, Commerce City has sought to become a balanced residential community rather than one defined by its industrial uses.

Just west of the study area sits the master-planned community of Reunion.



lowing for 36,000 dwelling units, or about 90,000 residents at buildout. At 2,500 acres, including a planned town center adjacent to E-470, the new master-planned community of Reunion is the largest planned-unit development (PUD) in the area.

In 2005, the Northern Range had a population of about 20,000, and it is expected to grow to about 28,300 by 2010. This rate is about 900 dwelling units a year. Furthermore, the DIA northeast district is projected to grow by about 4,000 dwelling units per year over the next ten years, with a projected per year average of 2,800 single-family detached units and 1,200 attached units.

Developers have been clamoring to submit and gain entitlements on large parcels with plans for many more units than predicted in the previous paragraph. Because of the weakness in demand for other types of development, landowners are trying to respond to perceived market opportunities in residential development. In general, sales have been declining over the last six months, to the point where developers with approved plat maps for sale are finding no prospective buyers. At the rate of 1,500 units absorbed per year, the city has already entitled ten years of absorption.

Although it is too early to tell, the possibility exists that difficult times for home sales may arise in the near future and that foreclosures on existing homes will increase if house prices decline absolutely. In other words, the housing boom that helped sparked the need for this panel appears to have peaked in the short term. This trend does not remove the need for another vision for the study area, which is a component of a larger mixed-use development.

Retail Demand

In general, the sequence related to the development of new communities places housing first, followed by retail services. Usually, shortly after housing construction, the residents move in and create a demand for neighborhood commercial services, such as banks, fast-food restaurants, laundries/dry cleaners, and hardware stores. Then the specialty retail and restaurants move in. As an area grows, large-store formats or big-box retailers show up; then finally regional destination retail, such as regional malls, outlets malls, and lifestyle centers, appear.

Some neighborhood commercial is just starting to come to Reunion, around East 104th Avenue and Tower Road. The developer has also announced

the siting of a Wal-Mart store on East 104th Avenue adjacent to both E-470 and the proposed town center site between East 104th and East 112th avenues. Detailed plans for the town center have not been released.

Other developers have plans for other key intersections on the major arterials in the Northern Range, eventually providing some choices in shopping not currently available. As a rule, national chains have relatively strict minimum thresholds, such as the number of “rooftops,” for approving new stores in burgeoning areas. The city should talk with different national chains to determine thresholds to evaluate whether sufficient homes are approved and being built to meet residents’ retail needs.

Overall in the DIA northeast district, 2.6 million square feet of retail currently exists. The DIA Partnership study projects a demand of 145,000 square feet per year for the period between 2004 and 2014. At current floor/area ratios, that demand translates to 15 acres developed per year, or 153 acres over 10 years. Unless a development of regional significance occurs, little of this could be expected to locate in the study area in that time frame—most of it going to the area west of Chambers Road where a majority of the rooftops is currently located.

Many major competing projects already exist or are proposed for the DIA northeast district. The primary examples are listed here:

- Prairie Center (510 acres of commercial) is in the city of Brighton.
- High Point (hundreds of acres of mixed-use commercial) is located in the cities of Aurora and Denver, just south of the study area on Tower Road.
- Prairie Gateway (240 acres of mixed use) is in Commerce City.
- Some sections of the Stapleton redevelopment, including the large specialty commercial development visible from the intersection of Interstates 270 and 70, located in Denver and just south of Commerce City, includes a Harkins movie theater, a Bass Pro Shop, Circuit City,

Super Target, Macy’s, eight other anchor tenants, and numerous restaurants.

- DIA retail is notable primarily because it is intended for those waiting at the terminal, not area demand. If DIA were to develop other uses (like 1,000 hotel rooms), the retail mall in the airport may take on additional significance.

All of these sites will compete with the study area for major name anchors. Larger scale generally translates to market success. Getting retail started in a burgeoning area is risky and difficult at the beginning of the development cycle.

Office Space and Multitenant Demand

The panel has identified office space and multitenant-demand projects in the DIA northeast district that also will be a source of competition for anything that is developed in the study area. One source of competition will come from the office and multitenant components in the retail projects discussed in the previous section.

According to the DIA study in 2004, the DIA northeast district had an office base of about 3 million square feet, or 2.7 percent of the total office space in the Denver metropolitan region. The vacancy rate for this space was about 20 percent. Additional projected demand for the period from 2004 to 2014 is about 106,000 square feet per year.

Similarly, in 2004, the DIA northeast district had a multitenant base of about 1.9 million square feet, with a vacancy rate of about 24 percent. Projected demand for the period from 2004 to 2014 is expected to be about 135,000 square feet per year.



Because the success of retail and office development depends on the presence of a sufficient number of residents, commercial uses will not come to the study area for a long time unless regionally and nationally significant developments are sited there.

Proximity to both downtown and the Denver International Airport can serve as a major engine for growth and economic development in the study area.



Following a pattern similar to that of the growth of retail services in new communities, demand for small-scale office space tends to arise after small-scale retail spaces have been established, which, as mentioned previously, is preceded by housing units. Larger-scale office tends to be built after a critical mass of other uses is in place or in response to the needs of specific users and tenants. Unless a development of regional or national significance is sited in the study area, large-scale office developments will not be forthcoming until much later in the development cycle.

Industrial Demand

Commerce City is known for its industrial base located on much of the area between Highway 2 and Interstate 76. The DIA northeast district is projected to absorb 51 percent of metropolitan Denver's industrial space at the rate of about 1.2 million square feet per year between 2004 and 2014. Because of its proximity to the airport, Commerce City is well located to absorb some of this industrial growth. However, the city faces many challenges in capturing this development type.

One major challenge is that other industrial projects are already on the ground or in the planning stages. The Front Range project south and east of the airport in Aurora is vying for a multimodal distribution and warehousing site with a small airport and rail-yard transfer facilities that are planned to help trains bypass the Platte Valley in downtown Denver. In addition, the Front Range Airport has more than 2,000 acres committed to heavy industrial uses.

Already working to capture the growth expected from DIA, the city of Aurora has designated thousands of acres south of the airport for industrial development. The city is also working with developers to approach DIA about setting up "through the fence" arrangements for airport cargo uses. (Through the fence arrangements are agreements in which properties adjacent to an airport are allowed to move products and personnel from off site onto the airport's land by passing over their shared border rather than entering the airport through its formal entrances.)

Another major challenge for Commerce City is that the airport has its cargo terminals on the south side of the airport. Original plans called for the terminals and the uses that accompany them to go on the north end of the airport, but the distances from markets and transportation proved too far for customers. These south-side terminals present much greater development opportunities for the cities of Denver and Aurora than for Commerce City, whose boundaries are on the west and north sides of the airport.

Moreover, actual tonnage shipped from the airport has declined over the last few years. Original projections for airport-related cargo have not been realized, caused by the decline in "hub and spoke" model shipment, among other factors.

The major impediment for near-term industrial uses in the study area, however, relates to two other issues within the study area itself. First is the lack of infrastructure that serves areas immediately adjacent to the airport. Water and sewer facilities need to be brought to these areas to make development of any kind feasible. In many cases, roads also would need to be brought to the sites. Second, the expense of the E-470 tollway precludes trucks from using this efficient north-south expressway system. For example, an 18-wheel (five-axle) truck pays a one-way toll of \$24.00 to go 26 miles from Interstate 70 to Interstate 25. With other routes available that are toll-free, the majority of drivers will opt to bypass E-470.

Because the city already has a relative low-cost industrial area with excellent access to the (non-toll) expressway system, development of airport-



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related cargo and industrial uses in the study area—and the entire Northern Range—is below expectations. With cheap land available near the current on-airport cargo facilities south of the airport, development potential in the study area is unlikely in the short term. Should the tolls on E-470 go away and the cargo functions be shifted to the north side of the airport as originally planned, then Commerce City would be in an excellent position to encourage these uses.

Hospitality Industry

As one would expect, DIA has generated significant demand for hotel and conference facilities. Currently, the Tower Road area south of Peña Boulevard has 1,324 rooms in ten hotels. The Gateway Park area has 1,343 rooms in eight hotels. In total, 2,667 rooms exist near DIA. Despite the rapid increase in the number of hotels along Tower Road south of Peña Boulevard, demand for hotels and hospitality services may have outstripped supply—not only for rooms, but also for conference facilities close to the airport.

Because of this apparent need, the panel recommends that the city aggressively seek a new hotel and conference center as its first anchor for the new “urban core.” The city has an opportunity to beat the competition and launch a critical component for its new community. Also, within the DIA charter is the potential for the airport to build up to a 1,000-room hotel within its boundary. If the city moves quickly, it should be able to beat the competition.

Market Potential Summary

Current projections of future land uses are weak because the metropolitan Denver economy is coming out of a period of low absorption for employment-related uses. Therefore, past trends are not the best indicators of future trends. In addition, theorists such as Thomas Friedman are predicting the growth of a new global economy that emphasizes value-added skills and international competition and that is facilitated by innovations in



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telecommunications technology (namely the low costs of accessing the Internet). The new global economy may change the prospects for cargo handling at DIA.

Assuming that retail growth will obey the conventional pattern of following housing, neighborhood retail will continue to be built in response to the houses already on the ground in the study area and the Northern Range. Developers are already poised to build when the national retail chains determine that the area is ready for them. Potential retail developments may perhaps be accelerated by providing siting incentives. Quick action by the city in facilitating the site selection of other land uses could preempt deals in competing markets.

Like retail uses, development of office space in the study area will—to the extent that the demand exists—follow the development of other uses, especially in the proposed urban core. And as for retail, the city can create incentives to lure office tenants to the area.

The short-term outlook for industrial uses in the study area is weak. They will continue to be sited west of Highway 2 in Commerce City, and airport-

Far left: South of Peña Boulevard in Denver, hotels and facilities supportive of business travelers are springing up to take advantage of properties near the airport. Below, left: Development on the open plains of the Northern Range increases steadily—in 2005, the Northern Range had a population of 20,000, which is expected to grow to about 28,300 by 2010.

The one-square-mile BFI landfill, the 53-square-mile DIA, the 27-square-mile Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, and the four-square-mile Barr Lake recreation and conservation area surround the study area and can potentially buffer land uses in the study area from the rest of Commerce City.



related industrial uses will continue to locate themselves south of the existing cargo terminals on airport property or in Aurora. A possibility exists for a brighter outlook in the long term, however, if cargo terminals are located on the north end of the airport, as originally anticipated.

Given the analysis of demand by real estate sector, the greatest short-term demand will be from developers of large, specialized land uses—the previously mentioned developments of regional and national significance. Bringing regionally and nationally significant developments to the region would jump-start the demand for office and retail uses that would otherwise be contingent on residential growth.

Although the level of demand for land to be used for developments of regional and national significance is not determinable at this time, the panel believes that a number of features make the study area highly attractive. These features include the site's proximity to downtown, the airport, and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, combined with the noise buffering created by the nearby large-scale land uses and the fact that land assembly costs will be small because huge sections of property are owned by few individuals.

Planning and Design

As discussed in the Market Analysis section, growth is coming to the Northern Range; yet the commercial component will be contingent on residential growth. So far, the Northern Range has been the receiving area of significant residential development in the last several years, and these developments are beginning to set the character for this section of Commerce City. Retail services are as yet inadequate to serve residents' needs. However, a long-needed supermarket will be provided when Wal-Mart completes a new store near the corner of East 104th Avenue and E-470. This facility will be the anchor for a town center retail development to be provided within the Reunion PUD—the large master-planned community developed by Shea Homes west of the study area. Current development plans suggest that East 104th Avenue will become one of the primary retail arterials in the Northern Range area.

With the households coming in to support more commercial development, the panel cautions the people of Commerce City on the advisability of strip commercial development. The better-planned communities are trading this strip pattern for the more-traditional retail centers that provide pedestrian village environments that serve as community focal points for their lives.

Currently, the emerging image in the Northern Range is far from consistent in quality. Truly healthy communities provide high-quality living environments for everyone. The city needs to set and adhere to high standards of housing, community planning, public area infrastructure, and parks and open space. Then the city must enforce compliance from developers.

Development Plan

This study has identified a development plan that is directly derivative of the regional positioning, the physical constraints, and the truly terrific op-

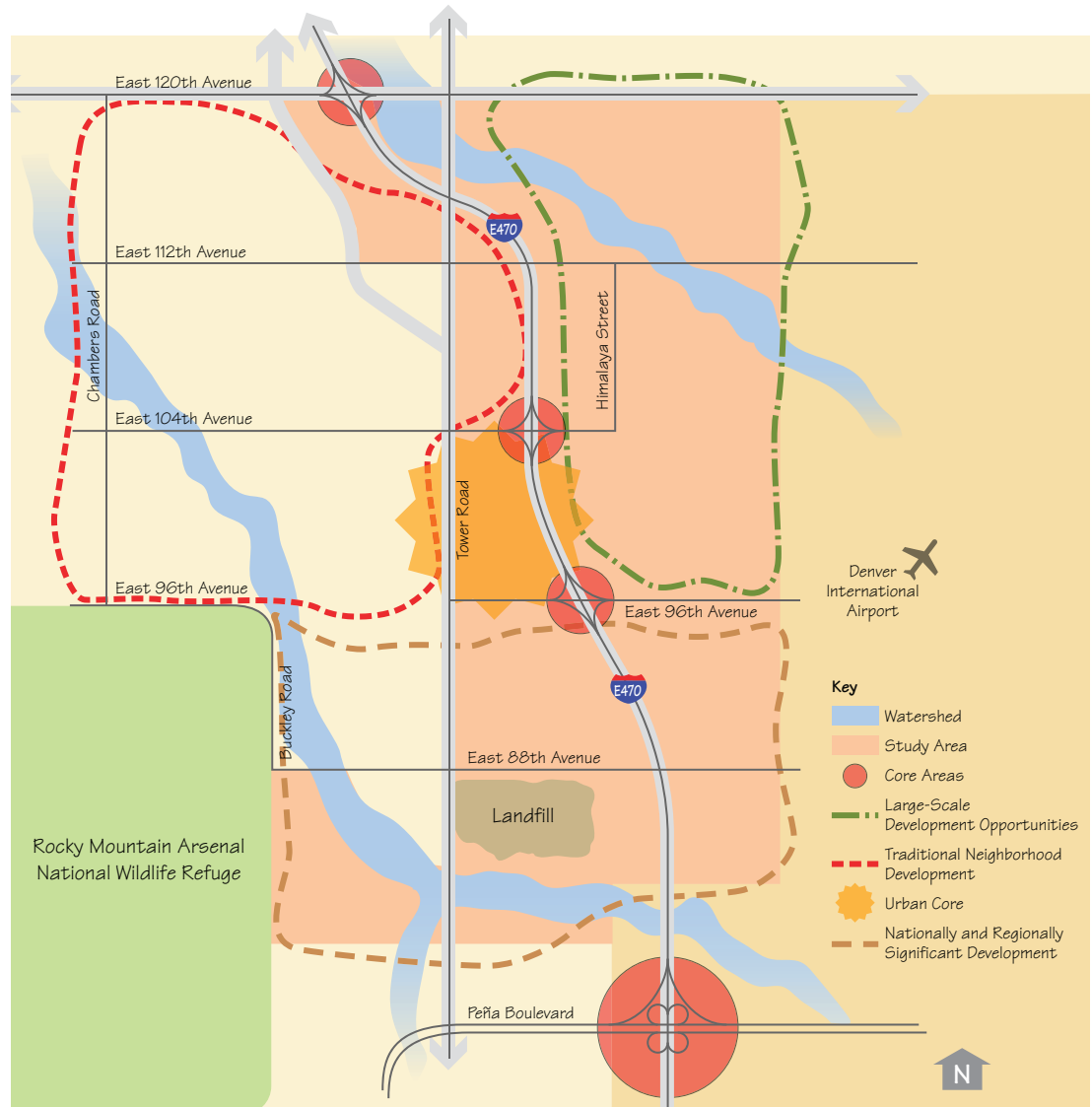
portunities of Commerce City's Northern Range. The plan is intended not only to serve the emerging local needs of the city but also to provide a physical framework for the eventual capture of the high-value development that Commerce City's regional assets will eventually draw. This concept has four planning districts that are meant to complement existing uses and topography while taking advantage of the large undeveloped parcels of land.

The traditional neighborhood development district in the northwest part of the study area builds off the existing fabric of single-family homes. Cradled between the wildlife refuge and the airport in the southern section of the study area is the district that will be devoted to nationally and regionally significant developments. The northeastern side of the study area, east of E-470, is land that is well suited to large-scale employment opportunities. And the middle of the study area, between East 104th, East 88th Avenue, Tower Road, and E-470, is reserved for the urban core district—a mixed-use area where all of the uses will overlap, forming a high-density focal point for Commerce City.

A Traditional Neighborhood District

The planning and design quality of Commerce City has in the last few years trended upward. Although recently significant steps have been made, indicators suggest that market forces may be pulling that standard down instead of up. Commerce City should not allow this downward trend to happen. Planning standards should be implemented that follow the best practices for healthy neighborhoods, sustainable landscapes, and social equity. Rather than creating enclosed neighborhood enclaves, gating the city precincts, these neighborhoods should be interconnected by streets, walkways, park systems, and greenways. Careful attention must be paid to housing mix, street size, lot size, and providing opportunities for walking and pedestrian activity.

Proposed land uses for the study area.



Consisting predominantly of single-family houses, the area north of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge and west of the study area is the logical choice for locating new homes. New developments are able to build off the existing infrastructure of residential communities. Although housing will be concentrated here, the entire study area is still zoned for mixed use, and dwelling units could, with careful planning and design, be located elsewhere in the study area.

Large-Scale Employment Opportunities

Much of the land adjacent to the airport is well suited for very large floor plate uses and is near or falls within the 60 day-night level (DNL) contour

of the airport air-traffic patterns that is deemed unsuitable for residential occupation. (DNL is an index the federal government uses to measure and compare noise levels.) The northern edge of the study area falls within this noise contour. Properties within the noise contour present a fallow opportunity area that can be brought to bear fruit with the right public/private partnerships. Such large-scale users, including production facilities, distribution centers, and corporate campuses, will come with special land area and environmental requirements. This site would also be perfect for a high-profile employment center, such as a corporate headquarters. With the proper economic development strategy, Commerce City can capture



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1. The intersection of E-470 and Tower Road looking east.
2. The intersection of East 104th Avenue and E-470 looking northwest.
3. The intersection of East 96th Avenue and E-470 looking northwest.
4. The intersection of East 88th Avenue and E-470 looking northwest.

this category of tenants. Also, many large-scale users can be lured to the Denver region who will view proximity to DIA as a major asset.

The panel’s suggested employment district includes all of the noise contours in the northern area and continues south until East 88th Avenue. This outline will allow the district to take full advantage of the off-ramps from E-470 at both East 88th Avenue and East 104th Avenue.

To an extent, this development would be greatly supported by the creation of “through the fence” agreements with DIA. This area would also benefit from the expansion of the airport and if the proposed siting of cargo facilities on the northern edge of the airport property ever comes to pass. Even if no changes to the airport take place, this district’s two E-470 off-ramps make it a prime location for corporations interesting in being close to a major airport.

Developments of National and Regional Significance

Developments of national and regional significance should be located at three regional “doorways”: the front doorway to Denver International Airport,

the northern doorway to the city of Aurora, and the southeastern doorway to Commerce City. This positioning along the E-470 corridor between the airport, the Peña Boulevard corridor, and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge provides superb access, excellent visibility, and a variety of regional assets at its doorstep.

Major attractions and destinations belong in the southern portion of the study corridor and the area immediately south of it—including those that would particularly benefit from adjacency to the Peña Boulevard corridor. They might also include destinations that specifically serve or reflect the Colorado outdoors lifestyle.

The Urban Core

Highway interchanges are value generators. The E-470 corridor is a terrific opportunity for Commerce City to seize the development demand that will eventually arrive at the East 120th, East 104th, and East 96th Avenue interchanges. Nevertheless, development along E-470 is a long-term goal because E-470 is a toll road, and currently drivers prefer to take Tower Road. Developments around the traffic nodes at both Tower and E-470

The city must plan for multiple transit options in the study area.



must be “shaped”—for maximum financial return, for optimum infrastructure investment, and for the enjoyment and delight of the people of Commerce City.

The area between Tower Road and E-470 is the perfect place to concentrate a high-density mix of development types to form a new urban core. This core area must be constructed at a density that provides a cohesive sense of place. This new urban core should not be dominated by the automobile but should be the realm of the pedestrian. All destinations should be within the urban core and should be within a five-minute walk from the center. Many destinations must be available to choose from: workplaces, a great hotel, terrific restaurants, a public library, educational outreach centers, art galleries, and movie theaters—to name a few. These destinations should be located along city streets consisting of three- and four-story buildings (in both mixed-use and single-use configurations). Finally, at the center of the urban core, a great public square should be designed that is active day and night and beautiful though every season.

To create and preserve this great place, planners must reserve the urban core for multifamily residential living to the exclusion of single-family de-

tached homes. This place must provide a significant number of nonretail jobs as its employment base, yet provide a variety of pedestrian-serving retail establishments and entertainment uses adding up to a signature urban destination. And equally important, this urban core must be shaped by density and served by urban plazas, amenitized street-wall streets, and pedestrian connections that attract people, especially members of the surrounding community.

Smart Growth on the Suburban Fringe

Drawing circles on a map to indicate where different uses should go is the easy part. Care must be taken to ensure that the design and urban form of the new development enhance and improve the quality of life for the citizens of both Commerce City and the entire Denver metropolitan region. Crucial for the planning and design of all future developments in the area will be consideration of the special issues of growth at the edges of suburbia, because while today it is the edge, tomorrow the edge will be the heart of a new community. Also, when the infrastructure has been laid, the streets paved, and the parcels divided, the city will have no second chances. Commerce City has one chance to build out correctly, or it will spend much more time and money fixing mistakes.

Create a Vision and Stick to It

Most important, the city must have in place a shared vision of the future. The panel recognizes that its endeavors are a first step in this direction, but the entire community must form a shared vision of the future of their city and then use this vision as the basis for a growth plan. When everybody is on the same page, there can be *no* deviations from the vision. Any exceptions will create discontent and disinvestment in the plan. Furthermore, small changes to the plan can add up to a finished product that is completely different from what was first envisioned.

Protect Green Infrastructure and Natural Environmental Systems

One of the main reasons why people move to the suburbs is for the greenery, the open spaces, and the rural character. Ironically, the high demand for a rural lifestyle can very rapidly transform farmlands and pastures into congested intersections bordered by concrete and parking lots. As mentioned earlier, the panelists note that a Commerce City park plan already exists, which is part of a larger proposed regional system of greenways. However, the need to protect the natural beauty, greenery, and floodplains of the region as the city grows bears repeating. These green spaces should form the base of the city's green infrastructure. Green infrastructure is a community's natural life-support system—a strategically planned and managed network of habitat, parks, greenways, conservation easements, and working lands with conservation value that support native species, maintain natural ecological processes, sustain air and water resources, and contribute to the health and quality of the community's life.

Focusing on the green infrastructure also helps protect an area's environmental systems and can help conserve resources. Open spaces and floodplains not only improve the quality of life for residents by providing space for recreation and proximity to natural beauty, but these places when designed correctly also can save water, filter pollutants in rainwater, and decrease the amount of stormwater runoff that ends up in sewers.

Plan for Multiple Transit Options

Although such considerations may seem premature, Commerce City's plans for the Northern

Range must include multiple transit options. One of the biggest challenges for growing suburbs is traffic congestion. Commerce City is in an advantageous position to plan and shape its transportation infrastructure before demand exists for it. The panel recommends looking at Denver's other suburban cities and neighborhoods for examples of what works and what does not. One of Commerce City's goals in this area must be to make sure that the Regional Transit District system of commuter and light-rail trains includes multiple stops in the Northern Range.

Designing a Balanced Community

Commerce City must plan for growth as a 21st-century community. Doing so will involve looking back at its past, taking into account today's growth demands, and anticipating long-term demand in the future. An assessment of this type leads to the conclusion that Commerce City must use its terrific assets to embrace the best attributes that a city can develop.

These assets include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A properly scaled and beautiful street framework;
- A wide variety of employment opportunities both in type and in income;
- Great interconnected neighborhoods;
- Urban places of vitality and delight;
- Superb public parks linked by greenway networks;
- A celebration of the climate and the regional ecology;
- One-of-a-kind destinations drawing national and international visitors.

All these attributes should be integrated in a rational development framework that provides for the flexibility that real-world cities need to grow, breathe, and prosper.

Development Strategies and Implementation

Commerce City faces many challenges as both it and the Denver metropolitan region grow. Chief among these is determining how the city can provide greater clarity and direction in managing growth while simultaneously allowing for flexibility in uses and timing. Similarly, how does the city provide good development opportunities now, yet preserve greater opportunities for development in key areas in the future? Finally, how does the city keep the competitive advantage of lower land costs and simple approval processes while setting and enforcing high standards that will attract high-quality development and improve the city's image?

Development Strategy

A fundamental responsibility of local government is to regulate its land uses and development. This regulation is intelligently done only in the context of planning for regional growth. Commerce City is very fortunate in its location in a part of the Denver metropolitan region that is well poised for future development.

In the face of the remarkable growth in the last five years, Commerce City has ratcheted up both its expertise and experience in planning for growth and economic development and in reviewing and approving development proposals. Given the projected growth and potential opportunities over the next ten years, however, Commerce City will have to accelerate its learning curve.

Current plans for the E-470 corridor and the panel's study area show a sea of red—red is the color used to indicate that this area has been designated for mixed-use development. This land use shows a well-intended indication of the desire for a flexible mix of uses over a vast undeveloped area. The problem is that without greater definition—or differentiation—of this “red sea,” owners and developers have no useful guidance, and the real

potential exists that development decisions made in the next five years will impede far greater economic opportunities in a ten-, 20-, and 30-year time horizon. Fortunately, given the scale of the area, enough land exists to handle all of the city's needs, if properly sorted out. The city's immediate future planning needs—of which this panel is a part—is to do that sorting out.

The goals of this sorting process must be to

- Provide flexibility in timing and uses, in response to market;
- Retain nimbleness to seize significant economic development opportunities;
- Limit leap-frog development;
- Give clearer direction so the private market can intelligently respond, taking into account:
 - The potential within the market for various development types;
 - Regional access;
 - Availability and likelihood of infrastructure (especially water and sanitation);
 - Noise contours created by DIA;
 - Past development plans;
 - Growth boundaries.

Implementation

Development strategies are implemented by the confluence of the city's plans, zoning, and approval process, and the actions and investment of the development community. Although Commerce City has the usual array of zoning and subdivision controls under Colorado law, as this development strategy moves forward, the city will need to use

additional tools—tools that have been used elsewhere in the region and nation.

The clearest example for where additional planning and new implementation tools will be needed is for the future urban core (as discussed in the Planning and Design section of this report). The three existing interchanges with E-470 in Commerce City—at 96th Avenue, 104th Avenue, and 120th Avenue—present the best long-term opportunity for creating urban centers by attracting first-class office space, regional retail, and multi-family housing. The city's tools for implementing the strategy for these urban centers must

- Preserve the long-term economic opportunity while allowing initial development to establish the urban center's presence;
- Accentuate the regional access;
- Ensure the necessary infrastructure for the center's phased development;
- Ensure the center's mixed-use character and urban sense of place by linking various uses and by applying appropriate design and siting requirements.

Achieving this goal will require more-detailed plans, with resultant zoning, for the areas surrounding each of these intersections. In light of the existing activity and infrastructure, and the strongest current potential, the area around the intersection of 104th Avenue, Tower Road, and E-470—the site designated in the Planning and

Design section for the urban core—is the most logical place to start more-detailed plans.

The conceptual plans for the Reunion Town Center are potentially a good starting place for the future urban center because the town center could provide a transition from retail and services to the more-intense future uses intended to serve a regional market and draw from a regional employment force.

Further planning should result in a special zoning district with phased entitlements and phased infrastructure covering up to a 20- to 30-year time horizon. Foremost, it should permit immediate development of market opportunities that arise while not precluding or impeding larger-scale development that can occur as the regional market matures. The actual zoning must be flexible and not overly prescriptive but must ensure—over time—the higher intensity and mixed-use character.

District plans can be an excellent tool for linking uses in a variety of ways to ensure a mixed-use character. One technique is to use phasing triggers that divide the significant overall entitlements into phases. Each phase would have a certain quantity of specific uses, such as number of housing units or square footage of various commercial uses. The sequencing within each phase of development is up to the developer and the market, but the next phase of entitlements is not triggered until all these uses have been built.



The sponsor briefs the panelists on the challenges facing the study area.

The city is fortunate because the study area is composed of large parcels owned by a small group of individuals or families, which will save on any land assembly costs.

Similarly, the siting and urban design of this future urban district must be ensured by guidelines contained in the zoning. Such guidelines may require the preservation of key sites, interim uses, or the ability for sites to intensify over time.

For example, other districts have urbanized over time by replacing surface parking with structures and adding additional uses and density to adjacent parcels. This evolution over time should be planned in advance rather than jerry-rigged.

Phasing development over decades is very challenging. Existing developments—including office parks and shopping malls—that did not contemplate, or plan for, additional uses and intensities are being retrofitted to take full advantage of a growing and maturing market. In this region, Belmar is a successful example of the reconstruction of a shopping mall. Here in Commerce City, which is at the very front end of its economic growth, the phasing and evolution of the growth of these key future urban centers must be planned now.

The city has the legal right to undertake and approve district plans and its zoning. Typically, to be most effective, the plan should be undertaken in concert with the major property owners. Although the direction and cost of such a joint planning effort will depend on the interest and sophistication of the landowners, the city should not be in the position of only reacting to a development proposal. Numerous examples of plans and zoning for phased development exist that can be modeled for the appropriate mix of flexibility and requirements.

How the city regulates regional development outside the proposed urban centers is also crucial. If the greater-intensity development can occur virtually anywhere, the potential market for the urban centers where such development is best located will be dissipated.

The city's implementation of the development strategies for these huge areas outside the sug-



gested urban center likely will not require new tools. What it will require is the formalization of the highest standards that have already been used by Commerce City in the most successful residential subdivisions to date and, most important, the consistent

application of those standards. Such standards should not be rigid, but they should be high and they must be adhered to even in a softening residential market.

It is not the city's responsibility to compensate for market fluctuations by cheapening its standards. Everyone interviewed believes that the long-term growth prospects for the Northern Range are very good. The city is in the marketplace for the long haul, and its standards should establish a long-term, high-quality community and the image that Commerce City seeks. Some of the least-expensive new housing in the region can be provided, not by low standards, but by requiring a variety of housing types and lot sizes through the existing PUD process. In this manner, Commerce City will be in the business of creating communities not just subdivisions.

Bringing Private Developers to the Table

The implementation of the plan discussed in this report involves creating an urban core, strengthening of the city's residential design guidelines, aggressively pursuing nationally and regionally significant uses, and preserving the northeastern quadrant of the study area for major employment users. The plan requires a long-term perspective that the panel believes is shared by several of the local landowners and developers. This shared belief is good news for all involved from the standpoint that the policy makers and private sector partners see a common market reality for their specific areas of influence.

A tremendous amount of active and proposed development activity exists across the Northern Range and within the study area. In addition to

the large number of single-family developments, numerous large tracts have preliminary PUDs in place and are in the process of being planned and designed. Some of the mixed-use development being contemplated falls outside the 2030 Urban Growth



Boundary and within the 60 DNL noise contour of DIA. Although the early conceptual plans for many of these projects will not be totally in keeping with Commerce City's new vision for the study area, likely some elements of those plans will complement the new concept.

The development community will continue to eye the Northern Range because of its excellent regional location, low land costs, and proximity to DIA. The panel believes that Commerce City has a reputation as being an easy place for developers to do business. This positive reputation is important for the community and will help drive prospects and projects to the area. The fact that development wants to locate in the Northern Range is important, and how the city manages that development is imperative to its future.

Commerce City is fortunate to have a small number of landowners who control large parcels in the Northern Range area. Members of the staff and council would be well advised to initiate outreach to those landowners for maintaining positive communication about the new plans for the area. The panel understands that this effort is already underway, and the participation of these landowners in the ULI advisory services panel process indicates the willingness for partnership from both sides of the dais.

Simplify the Regulatory Environment

The city should undertake several specific tasks to make its vision for Commerce City a reality. First, the city must simplify the regulatory environment that governs the study area. Presently, at least five comprehensive or regional plans direct the type, scale, and nature of development within the study area. Among those plans are the Metro Vi-

sion 2030 plan, the Commerce City Zoning Ordinance, the New Lands Transportation Plan, and the New Lands Comprehensive Plan 1992. Now, in addition to those existing plans, the ULI advisory service panel recommendations will be considered. On top of

those, each developer will have its own unique PUD ordinance. From the developer's perspective, the sheer number of plans and rules is daunting. Furthermore, the city's ability to monitor development for compliance under such a complex system would likely be compromised.

Implement Form-Based Codes

The city must simplify the rules so that its desires can be clearly understood and its standards met with a minimum of complication and complexity. The panel does not suggest that the city should lower its standards in any way, but it must simply find a more efficient way to convey them. Developing form-based guidelines for the Northern Range study area that use 80 percent imagery and 20 percent text would satisfy this need. Form-based codes rely on less-prescriptive design standards and the 80/20 split between graphic representations and prescriptive standards allows developers to quickly grasp the desires of the city.

The use of imagery and broad overlay use districts also enables the city to set the tone and priority of area development while maintaining a high level of flexibility. Rather than rewriting significant portions of prescriptive code, staff simply swaps or adds additional imagery to broaden or more narrowly define the desired function and aesthetic of an area or use.

Provide Incentives, Consistency, and Stability

Demonstrations of stability and consistency will ultimately create an environment of confidence that promotes good development practices. Developers need to know what the rules are and that all similar projects are treated equally. The city should also create opportunities to reward a project that reaches to improve the built environment

Developers and city staff must work together in developing the study area to benefit all parties, or spend a lot of time and money in the future to fix their mistakes.

or answers a critical need for the community. The extraordinary efforts made by the city to work with private development partners to develop the Prairie Gateway complex illustrate a recent example of an incentive-based approach to community building.

The next critical component for the city is the consistent application of its codes. Consistency creates a comfort level for landowners and developers that they will be treated fairly by the city. The pledge by the city to uphold this standard is going to be critically important for the city's ability to maintain positive relationships with landowners and developers during the coming years. If developers meet or exceed the standards Commerce City has set for the area, the city should feel comfortable working with them.

Providing incentives to groups who endeavor to improve the built environment and whose projects will make substantial economic contributions to the community should be strongly encouraged. Alternatively, exceptions may be considered for developments that provide a specific market niche identified by the city as necessary for the realization of Commerce City's ultimate mission to be a balanced and complete community where people can live, work, and play.

Create "Buy In" from Developers

The expectations of private sector builders and developers will need to be managed proactively for the city to be successful in implementing its new vision for the Northern Range. City council and staff members should expect push-back from some members of the development community as they come to terms with the policy change in the Northern Range. The level of reaction to these new policies and priorities will depend on their effect on each active project and the stage of development or entitlement of those active projects. No one wants to be told "no" in the short term, even if they recognize the value of these new policies over the long term.

A secondary recommendation for the implementation of the proposed study area plan is for Commerce City to create buy-in among its private sector partners by clearly demonstrating the mutually beneficial long-range economic effects of

following the ULI recommendations. Specifically, the city needs to quantify the incremental value that all parties will realize by holding out for developments of national and regional significance rather than following more conventional but faster development models. The city must communicate to all parties that everyone benefits when things are well planned and designed.

Plan for Infrastructure

Some landowners and members of the development community may be under the impression that the city is responsible for funding the majority of transportation and utility infrastructure. Commerce City has already begun to establish a precedent of requiring developers to make substantial contributions to infrastructure to begin development. The panel recommends that these initiatives be expanded.

The city should be prepared to hear builders express concerns about their ability to compete in the marketplace if they are required to spend additional sums building public infrastructure. Commerce City has already shown a willingness to address this concern by allowing the use of metro districts and by requiring that property owners join the General Improvement District (GID) before they may develop. By requiring all development tracts to be included in the GID, the city increases the pool of incremental property tax, which gives the GID greater bonding capacity.

Presently, the city's impact fee structure funds roughly one-half of the costs associated with new development. From the developers' standpoint, they would like to see this percentage increase. That is not realistic and certainly not in the city's best interest.

Considering the vast amount of land within the study area and the economic reality associated with bringing utility and transportation infrastructure to the study area, Commerce City should create a development sequencing plan that clearly defines the order in which infrastructure will be developed. If a developer wishes to leapfrog to an unserved parcel, it should be required to fund the lion's share of the required infrastructure. Conversely, should a project of regional significance present itself on an outlying parcel, the

city may consider participating more extensively as an incentive to the desired development. The city's participation in the Buffalo Run Golf Course, the Rapids Soccer Stadium, and the Prairie Gateway demonstrate its willingness to flex its economic development muscle in the name of worthy projects. This spirit must continue to ensure the timely success of future projects in the study area.

The responsibility for policy makers is to create public policy and development guidelines that encourage, among other things, the proper balance between residential and commercial development. The responsibility of the private sector is to bring its vision, energy, and experiences to the places it intends to create for the benefit of the community. The invitation to the ULI advisory panel illustrates the city's strong desire to create policy that is proactive and successful. This panel hopes that the private sector players will regard the panel's recommendations as more than abstract theories.

It can also hope that the legacy of ULI's advisory service panel program will help bridge the gap between the perspectives held by those two groups.

The creation of meaningful partnerships will be critical to the future success of Commerce City. The panel repeatedly heard from the sitting city council of its desire to make Commerce City a balanced and special place. This vision for the future of Commerce City will not be achievable without the support and commitment by private sector partners to participate in that vision. The city is urged to take its dream seriously and believe in both its ability and authority to make Commerce City the balanced community the city wants it to be.

Conclusion

The panel believes Commerce City has five outstanding attributes that, taken together, offer a singular prospect for future community success:

- A unique location between two valuable resources, Denver International Airport and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge;
- The ability to accommodate unique developments of national and regional significance;
- Large tracts of undeveloped land that lend themselves to these uses;
- The opportunity to develop a brand-new urban core;
- The potential to leverage these developments to fund the rehabilitation and rebuilding of existing older neighborhoods.

This report challenges the public and private civic leaders of Commerce City to join in implementing a new vision for the future. Commerce City has the opportunity to become a hub of business and entertainment activity—an active, bustling center that is attractive in the region as a place people want to live because of the quality of life and special destinations to be found here.

The city must shift its paradigm to embrace a vision of the future that is beyond everything that has been discussed before this report. The city must fully embrace a belief that it can be whatever it chooses to be.

To do so, the city must search for and retain the best possible city management team. In addition to high-quality management, vision and leadership will be essential attributes in this new team. The staff must be driven by a sense of purpose and mission and come to the table with broad ranges of experience and wide worldviews. The ideal can-

didates will embrace challenge and have proven track records of innovation and creativity. These candidates will have a history of results, not simply maintenance. Finally, the city management office must be given the freedom and tools to aggressively seek out the best solutions that promote and advance the civic vision.

The private sector must be completely on board with the new vision, and the city must work closely to find, create, and ensure win-win solutions to development issues. The private sector must be an active and integral part of the civic development team. The city must study the ways in which the great American cities came into being, then examine the respective roles of public and private sectors and determine what of that history is applicable today.

The city is the civic leadership and therefore it has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for what happens for generations. The city is also the keeper and implementer of civic visions. It must be wise and thoughtful in how it makes policy, and it must base its decisions on the understanding that every decision affects the lives of the residents' children and their children. The city must be expansive in its vision, clear about its mission, firm in its convictions, committed to principled action, steadfast in its willingness to seek creative and ambitious solutions, and assertive in its purposeful leadership.

The panel recognizes that Commerce City is in competition with the surrounding communities, but with assertive and concerted action the city can excel. Great civic leadership, public and private, is the stuff of legend in America. The panel challenges the city to join those historic leaders in making history.

About the Panel

Ray Brown

Panel Chair
Memphis, Tennessee

Brown offers architectural and urban design consulting services to diverse clients, including municipalities, community development corporations, downtown redevelopment agencies, private developers, and architects. He has more than 25 years of experience in both architectural and urban design. However, his passion is for downtown and neighborhood design and planning and for designing buildings that enhance the existing urban fabric.

Brown prefers projects that have the best potential for improving the quality of life for disadvantaged urban residents in at-risk neighborhoods. As a practicing architect, he has designed both single-family homes and multifamily projects that combine today's construction techniques with historical design precedents to produce affordable buildings that comfortably fit their contexts.

During his tenure as vice president for development of the Memphis Center City Commission, Brown reviewed proposals for downtown development projects that conformed to the overall Memphis downtown development goals and financial incentive eligibility requirements, evaluated and selected sites for proposed projects, and prepared preliminary development pro formas.

Brown is an active member of the Urban Land Institute and the Congress for New Urbanism and has participated in ULI advisory panels in cities across the country.

Thomas Curley

New York, New York

Curley's projects can be found on six continents for clients as diverse as the Walt Disney Company,

the Guggenheim Museum, the city of New York, the U.S. Air Force, the National Capital Planning Commission, the city of Washington, D.C., the New Jersey Nets, and the Smithsonian Institution.

Curley has designed new towns in the Philippines, China, and Australia and recently completed a submission for the 2008 Olympic Village in Beijing. He was the lead designer for Phase II Euro-Disney in Marne la-Valle and provided strategic planning for 9,000 acres of Disney property south of the Disney World Resort in Florida. His most recent works include the reconstruction of downtown Beirut, for which he won an international design award for excellence from the Congress for New Urbanism. In addition, Curley was one of the authors of the Legacy Plan for Washington, D.C., for the National Capital Planning Commission, and he is currently the lead planner for the master planning of Capitol Hill for Congress. Curley believes that to be called to service on public projects is the highest honor an architect can achieve.

Curley graduated from the Southern California Institute for Architecture with graduate degrees in architecture and urban design.

Peter French

Austin, Texas

After graduating from Trinity University with a BS in business administration, French started his real estate career in Houston, working for three years as a tenant and landlord representative. He spent two years with Chicago-based Equis Corporation and one year with Cresa Partners. After participating in the redevelopment and leasing of two historic mixed-use buildings in Houston's central business district, French transitioned into real estate development.

In 2001 he moved to Kyle, Texas, to work on the 2,200-acre mixed-use new urban community, Plum

Creek. As director of operations for Plum Creek Development, French became half of the two-man development team managing that complex project. Construction of Plum Creek began in 1999, and to date more than 1,400 lots have been developed and more than 1,200 homes occupied. The largest planned unit development in Hays County, Plum Creek has several hundred acres of mixed-use property and has been selected as a future transit site for the Austin–San Antonio Commuter Rail District. The project has entitlements for well over 8,000 dwelling units and over 1,500 acres remain undeveloped, providing Plum Creek a strong and unique position in the Interstate-35 corridor's future.

In 2005, Plum Creek was selected by the *Austin Business Journal* as the Master-Planned Community of the Year, and in 2006 Plum Creek was named the New Development of the Year at the inaugural Envision Central Texas Community Stewardship Awards.

Since his arrival in Kyle in 2001, French has been very active in the local community. He served for two years as president of the Kyle Area Chamber of Commerce and was appointed to the city's Citizen Water Development Advisory Board and the city's Economic Development Committee. He currently serves on the private fundraising Foundation Board of the Central Texas Medical Center and was selected to participate in the 2006 Real Estate Council of Austin's Leadership Development Class. French is a Young Leader member of the Urban Land Institute, and he is presently a candidate for the CCIM designation.

Con Howe

Los Angeles, California

Howe is the director of the Urban Land Institute's Center for Balanced Development in the West. The center's role is to focus ULI's national work on the special land development issues of the fast-growing western United States.

Howe served as the director of planning for the city of Los Angeles from 1992 to 2005. His work included revising the city's general plan to provide a comprehensive strategy for growth; updating

the city's 35 community plans; streamlining the development permitting process; and creating new zoning to encourage mixed-use projects, affordable housing, and the adaptive use of older structures.

From 1987 to 1991, he served as the executive director of the New York City Planning Department where he directed a staff of 400 located in a central office and in five borough offices. Earlier, as director of the agency's Manhattan office, he helped direct major commercial growth to West Midtown and established urban design and preservation requirements for the city's Theater District and Times Square.

Before coming to New York City, Howe was executive director of the Massachusetts Land Bank, a state redevelopment agency, and served in the governor's office.

Howe received a master's degree from MIT's School of Architecture and Planning and an undergraduate degree from Yale.

William C. Lawrence

Jamestown, Rhode Island

Lawrence has more than 25 years of in-depth background and experience in real-world problem solving, strategy formation, feasibility assessment, and project management for complex real estate development projects. As principal of Cityscope, Inc., he engages in developing projects and providing contract services in project management and consulting to both public and private clients. Cityscope specializes in value creation for client assets, including strategic planning and assessment, asset positioning and management, and public and private financing.

Lawrence wrote the winning proposal and was designated a co-project manager for a \$275 million multiblock commercial development between a new Amtrak station on the northeast rail corridor and the TF Green Airport as a joint venture between the Bulfinch Companies; the city of Warwick, Rhode Island; and the state of Rhode Island. He has assisted a Boston community development corporation in planning a large commercial devel-

opment on excess public lands. Before that assignment, Lawrence was the contract project manager to outsource the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority real estate group with annual revenues in excess of \$5 million.

Prior to starting Cityscope, as director of seaport planning and development at the Massachusetts Port Authority, Lawrence planned and developed a diverse portfolio of public sector real estate assets on 400 acres. Before that, he created and directed public sector real estate consulting groups in Los Angeles and Boston for Kenneth Leventhal & Company (now E&Y Kenneth Leventhal Real Estate Consulting), a national CPA firm. Prior to that, he founded and managed for 12 years the William C. Lawrence Company, a market feasibility and economic development consulting firm located in Pasadena, California, and, for four years, he managed environmental policy planning at two

large West Coast new community developers, the Irvine Company and Mission Viejo.

Lawrence has a master's degree in city and regional planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design; a master's degree in business administration from Pepperdine University, Malibu; and a BA in Political Science from Trinity College, Hartford. He was awarded the Thomas J. Watson Traveling Fellowship to study new town planning in Europe and India after college. He is currently a full member of the Urban Land Institute and has been a full member of NAIOP and the Council on Urban and Economic Development. Interested in regional planning issues, Lawrence is a gubernatorial appointment to the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Commission and a member of its Executive Committee.