

# Executive Summary

The task of developing a Land Use Plan for the University of Denver has been an exciting collaborative process that engaged a variety of interested people, including members of the University’s Board of Trustees, faculty, students, neighbors, local business owners, and city government officials. This document sets forth a conceptual framework for future development that is tied to a set of planning, urban design, and campus development principles.

Since the Land Use Plan was first published in 2002, and now reprinted in the summer of 2007, much has been accomplished in the evolution of the campus, and these accomplishments have been recorded in this document. This update also heralds the on-going strategic initiatives undertaken by the University that are anticipated to have land use planning implications. It further confirms progress and completion on important civic initiatives such as T-REX, and calls attention to developments and changes in the local real estate environment which are affecting growth and change in the community.

While the University has long combined many aspects of sustainability, under the leadership of Chancellor Coombe, a more formal commitment to sustainable principles has been added to the update and may be found in Appendix A.

The 2007 Land Use Plan Update examines the planning assumptions, supporting principles and recommendations reflecting current conditions to ensure that the University remains a diligent steward of the overall quality and character of the community.



(2007) General Campus Plan showing current conditions

Why Plan?

Five primary factors triggered the need to undertake this planning process:

- 1. The University’s desire to identify the elements of its campus that are cherished and need to be protected into the future.
- 2. The opportunity for the University to engage in a collaborative planning process with both the community and the City of Denver to study options for internal campus growth along with planned changes in the regional transit and transportation systems.
- 3. The need to create a concept for future open space, building development, and infrastructure alignments that reinforce the physical unity and interconnectedness of the campus.

- 4. The need to better predict future campus boundaries and determine campus development capacity in the context of present and future zoning characteristics.
- 5. The need to acknowledge that a more comprehensive and inclusive planning process is critical for the University to realize its long-standing hope of consolidating all of its prime academic functions in one place.

These five factors are both important reminders of the original justification to take on the Land Use Plan, for the University of Denver, as well as points of reference that continue to guide capital planning and development decisions on the campus.



*The siting of parking structures needs to incorporate a larger planning vision that places emphasis on elements such as views, circulation, and open space.*



*The Denver skyline serves as a reminder of the importance of the campus as a place in the city.*

Why Update the Plan?

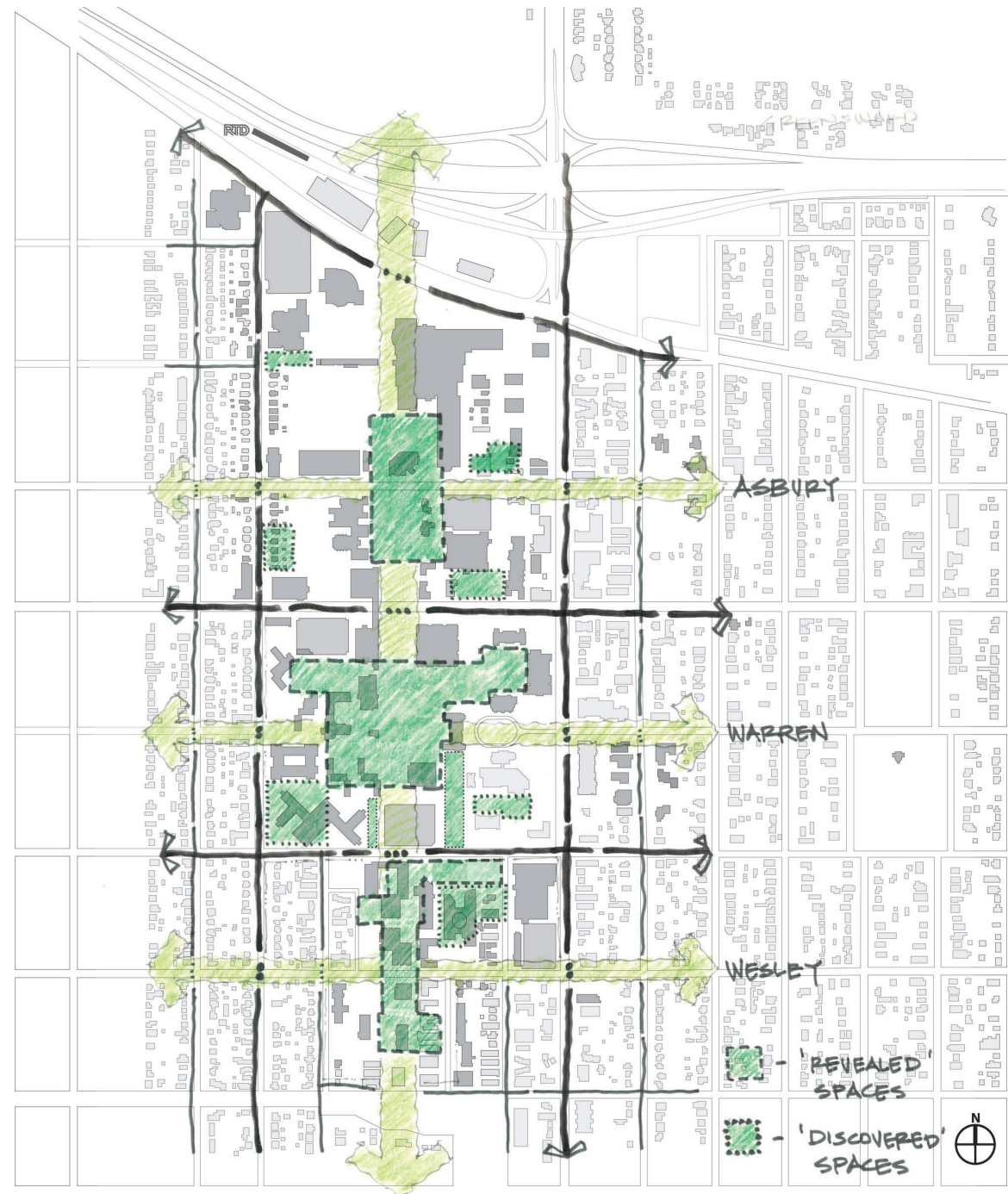
In addition to the aforementioned points, there are four factors that have driven the need to update the Land Use Plan. These factors include:

- a. The need to recalibrate University growth projections in response to administrative changes and expectations related to faculty populations in light of the Marsico Initiative.
- b. The need to document change in the campus and environs over the last five years including improvements to facilities, open space, transportation systems, and relationship improvements with adjacent neighborhoods since the 2002 Land Use Plan.



*The continuity of pedestrian movement throughout the campus has been a priority in developing a unifying theme for DU.*





*The concept of a Promenade is based on the idea that important open spaces are emphasized as part of a larger network that extends beyond campus boundaries.*

- c. The need to re-align current and future development projects with the initial planning principles; Promenade, access to the Regional Transportation District (RTD) University of Denver (DU) Light Rail Station and general transportation improvements, clearly defined campus gateways and boundaries, placement of future development, and programmatic streamlining to reinforce campus community.
- d. The need to communicate the University of Denver's future growth intentions to city officials and neighbors.

### Planning Concerns

In the early stages of the Land Use Plan, an inventory of present campus conditions was developed. The complete inventory is contained in the project notebook with the Office of the University Architect. Through this effort the planning team, along with the Steering and Working Committees, identified a number of concerns to be addressed in the Land Use Plan. The primary concerns addressed in the 2002 Land Use Plan included:

- Consolidation of the Law School and School of Music on the University Park campus.
- Mitigation of the traffic and parking impacts in the neighborhoods.
- Initial development of a notable campus entrance at the intersection of High Street and Evans Avenue.

- Development of a campus landscape and open space pattern along the west side of the campus core that reinforces pedestrian paths and open spaces in the historic core of the campus.
- Development of a series of open spaces within the campus core along the Promenade, that reinforces the sense of community and enables both formal and informal interactions amongst the campus community.

Since 2002, a number of the original land use planning concerns have been addressed through a variety of capital improvement initiatives on the campus and in the areas that surround the campus. Several challenges still need to be addressed, including:

- Disruption of the campus north-south visual and physical continuity by Asbury, Evans, Iliff, and Wesley Avenues.
- Neglect of properties by absentee landlords on High Street, an important transition zone from the campus to the adjoining neighborhood.
- Organization of buildings, circulation and open space south of Iliff Avenue that currently responds more to the historic subdivision plan than a rational campus design strategy.
- Distances as much as one-half mile between several academic buildings that make it difficult for students to move between them in a traditional class change interval.

Planning Concepts

The Land Use Plan for DU continues to be based on a concept for the organization of open space and pedestrian circulation along a central spine referred to as the “Promenade.” The Promenade is seen as an active corridor framed in many instances by existing buildings, landscape, and open spaces, but with a design that enhances continuity between the northern and southern campus extremes. The continuity would be expressed through the use of consistent high quality materials for paving, lighting, benches, and signage along the corridor. To capture this continuity, it is important that the Promenade not look like just another pedestrian path on the DU campus. It should be easily distinguishable. Moreover, the sum of the design of the Promenade needs to be unique and not wholly duplicated in other areas of the campus. Much progress has been made in the realization of the Promenade over the last several years.

This overarching idea for unifying the campus is complemented by other Land Use Plan recommendations below.

- The Promenade should embrace the University of Denver Light Rail Station at the northern end of the campus. The intent is to provide a seamless access corridor for students, faculty, staff, and visitors between the Light Rail Station and the campus that over time would encourage greater emphasis on rail travel to and from the campus.
- Strategic redevelopment along University Boulevard should be designed to strengthen the image of DU along this important corridor, provide opportunities to develop new academic

facilities that will have a public face on University Boulevard, and improve the streetscape to be more inviting for pedestrians.

- Campus gateways at the intersection of University Boulevard and Buchtel Boulevard and on Evans Avenue at the intersection of High Street should be defined, as demonstrated by the recent University Technology Services building (UTS). Both sites represent opportunities for significant program expansion and urban design improvements that will distinguish the University from surrounding properties.
- High Street could be envisioned as a higher-density neighborhood with townhouse-style housing framing the west side and two to three-story mixed-use campus buildings on the east side. This would emphasize the pedestrian corridor linking the Light Rail Station at Buchtel Boulevard.
- Long-term reorganization and development of the southern end of the campus between Harvard Gulch and Iliff Avenue would provide valuable sites for upgraded academic facilities. These would support both graduate and undergraduate programs in a setting comparable to the campus core and would help unify the relationships of property areas directly adjacent to the campus.
- Undergraduate facilities should be located along the Promenade enhance the campus community.



Evans Chapel



Penrose Library





*University Hall*

## What is a Land Use Plan?

A Land Use Plan is a tool designed to guide the development of the campus over a 20-year time frame. Certain principles in the Plan are intended to last in perpetuity. Due to the ever-changing face of higher education – in terms of funding, facilities needs, and program development – one cannot accurately forecast and plan for all improvements that will be made to the campus over the 20-year planning horizon. Rather, we must set in place a framework around which decisions may be made that protect those aspects of the campus that are “sacred” while leading future development to areas suitable for growth. The formation of a series of planning principles, designed to guide campus development rather than to forecast specific needs, allows the campus community to maintain control over the decisions that will be made today and in future years.

## Growth Expectations

The 2002 Land Use Plan stated a goal of 10 percent growth in enrollment, a goal that, five years later, is close to being reached. The University remains committed to the 20-year goal and will manage total enrollment within a narrow range. Recent growth and change has addressed programs where previous facilities were either inadequate or inaccessible to their students. Since the 2002 Land Use Plan, the University has met some of these academic improvements through completion of the Women’s College, the Graduate School of Social Work, and the School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management.

In addition, enhancement of student life is exemplified by the current construction of the Nagel residence Hall.

Over the next few years the University is preparing to commence work on three primary projects identified in the 2002 Plan: The construction of a new College of Education building, the construction of a new facility to house the School of Engineering and Computer Science, and the renovation and enhancement of the Penrose Library. Longer term projects are less defined as the University is nearing many of its near term strategic goals and is concentrating on initiatives to grow its endowment. The University will continue planning to address the replacement of outdated facilities along with strategic additions and renovations to existing buildings to continue to provide a world class learning environment. The commitment to the campus edges, as delineated in 2002, remains.

In a continuing effort to enliven the campus environment, the University has provided 430 new beds of undergraduate housing near the campus core coupled with an additional 356 beds now under construction adjacent to the Promenade. Longer term housing needs could be addressed with new graduate and faculty/staff housing located along the campus perimeter to provide a smoother transition to surrounding neighborhoods. Independent residential development projects currently underway along University Boulevard and University property acquisitions along High Street further support this planning goal.

Finally, there continues to be a pressing need for both informal and programmed athletic space on campus. While lighted competition fields should be located internally, unlit recreation space may be provided along campus edges to encourage movement into the campus and enhanced views.

Who Will Use the Land Use Plan?

Certainly the primary beneficiary of the Land Use Plan will be the University. The document is intended to facilitate decision making for many years. In particular, the document will provide DU with a rational basis for exploring alternative sites for future buildings. Moreover, the Plan identifies particular districts on the campus where more detailed investigation of design strategies is necessary.

For community planners, the Plan provides a context for development of future land use policies and transportation planning decisions.

For neighbors living around the campus, the Plan provides a better understanding of DU’s development and land acquisition intentions.

Organization of the Report

The Land Use Plan is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

Explains what the Land Use Plan is, summarizes the need for the Plan, how it will be used in the foreseeable future, who will use it, and the organization of the report.

Chapter 2: University of Denver - Past and Present

Reviews the historic development of the campus and briefly describes the existing conditions on the campus and in the community.

Chapter 3: Projections for Growth

Reaffirms DU’s expectations for growth and new development for the foreseeable future.

Chapter 4: Campus-Wide Planning Principles

Includes the land use principles and concepts for future organization and development of the campus.

Chapter 5: Campus Districts

Identifies some of the more important campus districts and preliminary recommendations for consideration in development of more detailed district planning studies.

Appendices

Includes information and recommendations from both the University and other consultants used in the creation of the document.