

# 3.0 LAND USE



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## EXISTING ZONING

The current zoning for the study area is shown below. The zoning has three letter/number designations:

- **“C”** stands for **“Urban Center”** which is the context for this area. This is due to its close proximity to downtown.
- **“MS”** stands for **“Main Street”** which is the district for all of Colfax Avenue. The general purpose for Main Street zoning is listed in the sidebar.
- **“5” and “8”** are designated **maximum stories** within each zone district. The majority of the western section allows 8-story development, as well as high priority intersections. The rest of the corridor is zoned for 5-story development.

Through interviews with developers, there seems to be consensus that some of the Main Street zoning parameters are counterproductive to new development. This is often due to the unique lot configurations along Colfax (e.g. skinny or narrow lots with restricted access and abrupt transitions to single family residential). The City should work to address some of these issues through text amendments to the Main Street zoning districts or by implementing an overlay zone.

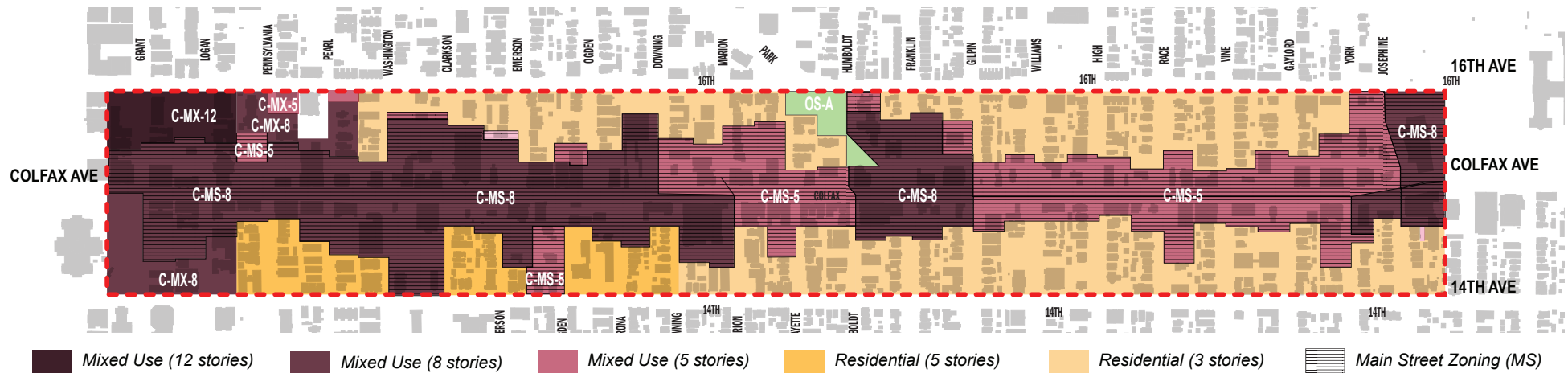
Another concern that was voiced through multiple interviews is that new development is not meeting the desired character and aesthetic that the community wishes to see for Colfax. Colfax is a unique and special place with rich history, but new development is not reflecting that. Therefore, in addition to zoning amendments, it is recommended that Colfax Ave work with the city and other BIDs along the corridor to create an additional level of design review through a design overlay district or other means. This would apply an additional level of design guidance that respects the historic, cultural and aesthetic significance.

Some challenges and potential solutions are listed on the following page, as discussed with property owners and developers for this project, as well as in a city-wide Colfax stakeholder meeting held on June 2, 2016 which identified land use and development challenges along Colfax Avenue throughout the City of Denver. Much of the recommendations include using incentives, or “carrots”, to achieve the desired vision for Colfax.

## WHAT IS THE INTENT OF MAIN STREET ZONING?

Below are condensed descriptions from [Section 7.2.4](#) of the Denver Zoning Code which include the General Purpose for Main Street Districts:

- To promote safe, active, and pedestrian-scaled commercial streets.
- To enhance the convenience, ease and enjoyment of transit, walking, shopping and public gathering.
- To ensure new development contributes positively to established residential neighborhoods and character, and improves transition between commercial and residential.



## ZONING CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

	CHALLENGE:	POTENTIAL SOLUTION:
<b>MINIMUM BUILDING HEIGHT</b>	<i>24-feet too high for one-story building (expensive air)</i>	<i>Flexibility on min. height for one-story buildings (example: may be lowered if ensure that main entrance on Colfax is active) or require three-stories and that each story must be habitable for offices or residences.</i>
<b>BUILD-TO REQUIREMENT</b>	<i>75% required build-to 0'-5' of lot line (difficult to create "people places," such as cafe seating)</i>	<i>Require 5' min. ground floor setback in constrained areas (80' ROW) - However, make sure context-sensitive solutions, i.e. don't want building faces "zig-zagging" back and forth; allow higher density if building is set back and positively contributing to public realm.</i>
<b>PARKING</b>	<i>Smaller and narrow lots are more difficult to meet minimum requirements, even with transit reduction.</i>	<i>District parking, especially near BRT stations, should be pursued (potentially P3 with new development); add parking meters along side streets (nearest Colfax) for more commercial on-street parking; and allow on-street parking to count towards required amounts.</i>
<b>SHALLOW LOTS</b>	<i>Hard to fit everything into standard lots and make it "pencil out"</i>	<i>Facilitate lot assemblage (consider alley vacation to combine lots on case-by-case basis); allow parking relief; analyze Board of Adjustments variances to inform future zoning text amendments that improve the development feasibility of shallow lots.</i>
<b>SIGNAGE</b>	<i>Current sign code was not updated with land development code - cannot do what is there now, so makes signs hard to preserve and hard to design new ones to fit in; Board of Adjustment process lengthy and not always on same page as staff.</i>	<i>Update sign code using Colfax as a pilot project or otherwise create a signage overlay for Colfax.</i>
<b>VARIANCES</b>	<i>Variances have proven difficult, creating a culture of "formula-driven" development proposals - developers know what will pass and what won't, so they do what's simple, but what works by-right is not meeting the spirit of Colfax.</i>	<i>City could create Ombudsman for Colfax to manage development and help to streamline the process for developers - a "one stop shop"; design guidelines could also help provide flexibility and creative solutions (might they be related to a list of pre-approved variances?)</i>
<b>INCENTIVES</b>	<i>Current structure doesn't incentivize good development, or "what the city wants" enough, resulting in cookie-cutter development (most often geared toward national credit tenants rather than small shops); current structure is not conducive to small development projects, leaving existing property owners with no valuable options to them.</i>	<i>City could offer more "carrots" for developers - incentives such as density bonuses, parking relief in exchange for affordable housing, enhanced public realm, etc; city could package pre-determined "allowable variances" and present these at the pre-development meeting so developers can have them in mind at pre-design phase of project; promote small development projects with gap funding from OED, CHFA, CDBG, DURA, etc.</i>
<b>CHARACTER CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES</b>	<i>Current zoning does not incentivize saving structures that contribute to the character of Colfax (funky, one- or two-story buildings zoned for 8 stories)</i>	<i>City could create a Transfer/Purchase of Development Rights (TDR/PDR) program for Colfax - identify eligible sites and receivable sites (preferably close to transit) to make saving buildings viable.</i>
<b>CREATIVE FINANCING</b>	<i>Development too costly for most developers; maintenance often falls on property owners</i>	<i>Corridor-wide or nodal TIF district or Urban Renewal district, GID, other to help pay for aspects of development (parking, public realm improvements, etc.); OED help fund gaps to make smaller, mixed use development feasible; increased maintenance from BIDs and City.</i>
<b>HOUSING</b>	<i>Not getting the density the city wants along Colfax</i>	<i>Offer incentives for density, affordable housing; loosen parking requirements for housing - especially near BRT stops (more than 25%); talk to CHFA - extend boundary to include Colfax corridor; actively pursue CDBG funding; create development prototypes that work for small/narrow sites.</i>

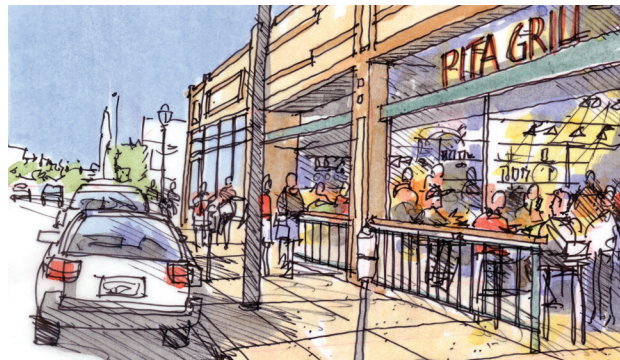


## BUILDING CHARACTER

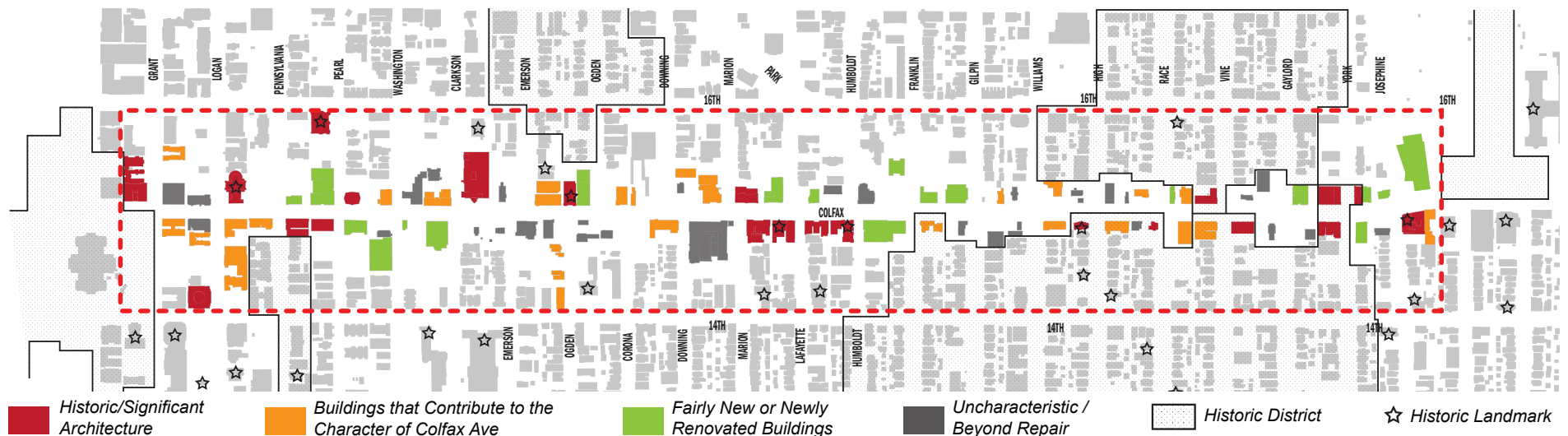
Much of the character of Colfax Ave can be read through its architecture. It includes a mixture of historically significant buildings as well as buildings that simply help to tell the history of the corridor but are not historically significant. There are also plenty of uncharacteristic or “beyond repair” buildings - these should be viewed as opportunities for redevelopment.

While the zoning allows a much higher density, and may justify a “scrape” to make development pencil out, developers should consider the social and historical benefit to saving structures that contribute to the character of Colfax and its rich history.

Additions (above, behind, or to the side) and facade renovations to buildings colored red, orange, or green in the diagram below should be considered to the extent feasible, as opposed to demolition. Buildings shown in gray indicate potential redevelopment opportunities due to poor condition of structures or their non-contributing nature. New structures should always seek to respond to the surrounding context and character.



Existing buildings can be renovated to contribute to the character of the district and help activate the street edge. Where the public right-of-way is limited, consider interior cafe seating that “opens up” to the street.





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## REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of redevelopment opportunities along Colfax. Many are related to Colfax's auto-oriented, post-WWII strip development. As Colfax increases in mixed use density and a BRT system is introduced to the street, the collection of gas stations, car washes, auto service uses, drive-in fast food uses and small, parking-in-front strip commercial will gradually be replaced with mixed use, pedestrian oriented development.

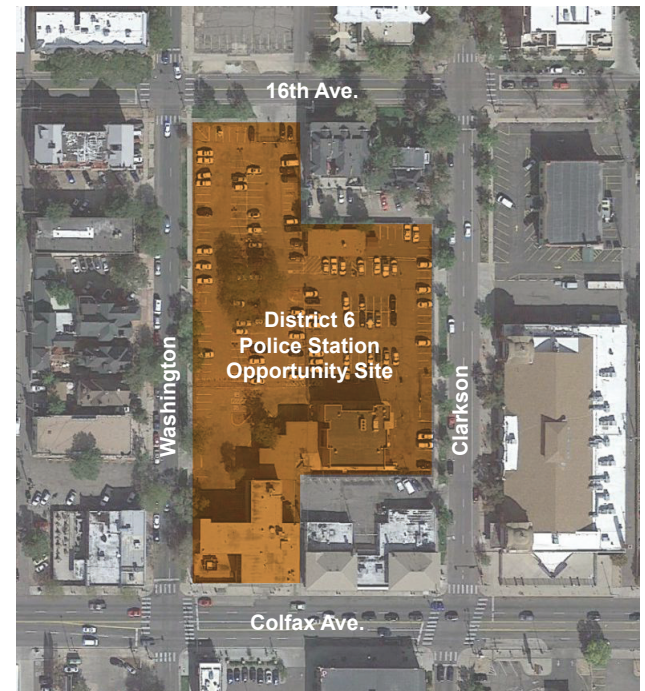
There is a substantial cluster of such opportunities between Washington and Downing, bookended by two public properties

- *The City and County of Denver's District Six Police Station at Washington, and*
- *The Federal government's Post Office distribution center at Downing.*

While the Post Office property is at a major BRT stop, it may be an unlikely development opportunity in the near future. However, the larger District Six Police property is much more likely to be redeveloped in the near future, depending on the outcome of the proposed 2017 bond issue.

Between these two properties are a cluster of auto-oriented uses across from the Ogden Theater. Most of these uses are on relatively shallow lots due to the presence of an atypical east-west running alley. These properties can be increased in depth (and redevelopment attractiveness) if the alley is partially or totally vacated.

The cluster of redevelopment opportunities between Washington and Downing Streets occur between two well-defined pedestrian-active nodes along Colfax: Argonaut/Natural Grocers and the Irish Snug block. As the redevelopment opportunities fill in, they will build on the vitality of the nodes and create a continuously vibrant street from Grant to Park Ave.



*The District 6 Police Station site could be a major catalyst development opportunity for the west end of the district.*





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There are other smaller scale opportunities scattered along Colfax, with another cluster of properties centered on Gaylord Street at Colfax. This cluster of opportunities can also build on an existing pedestrian-active node at York and Josephine streets, as well as the future location of another major BRT stop.

As an outgrowth of the streetscape recommendations, each of the properties indicated as redevelopment opportunities should have a set of public realm guidelines developed for them, so that when redevelopment does occur, these properties can help implement the streetscape recommendations.

It is a recommendation of this Plan that the City and Colfax Ave BID consider an overlay zone district with distinct design guidelines to encourage context-sensitive design along this important corridor.

***“We shape our buildings;  
thereafter they shape us.”***  
- Winston Churchill



Multiple redevelopment opportunities are clustered on the south side of Colfax between Clarkson and Downing Streets.



Smaller, auto-oriented developments that do not contribute to the character of Colfax Avenue should be replaced with mixed use buildings that positively contribute to the street and surrounding neighborhoods.



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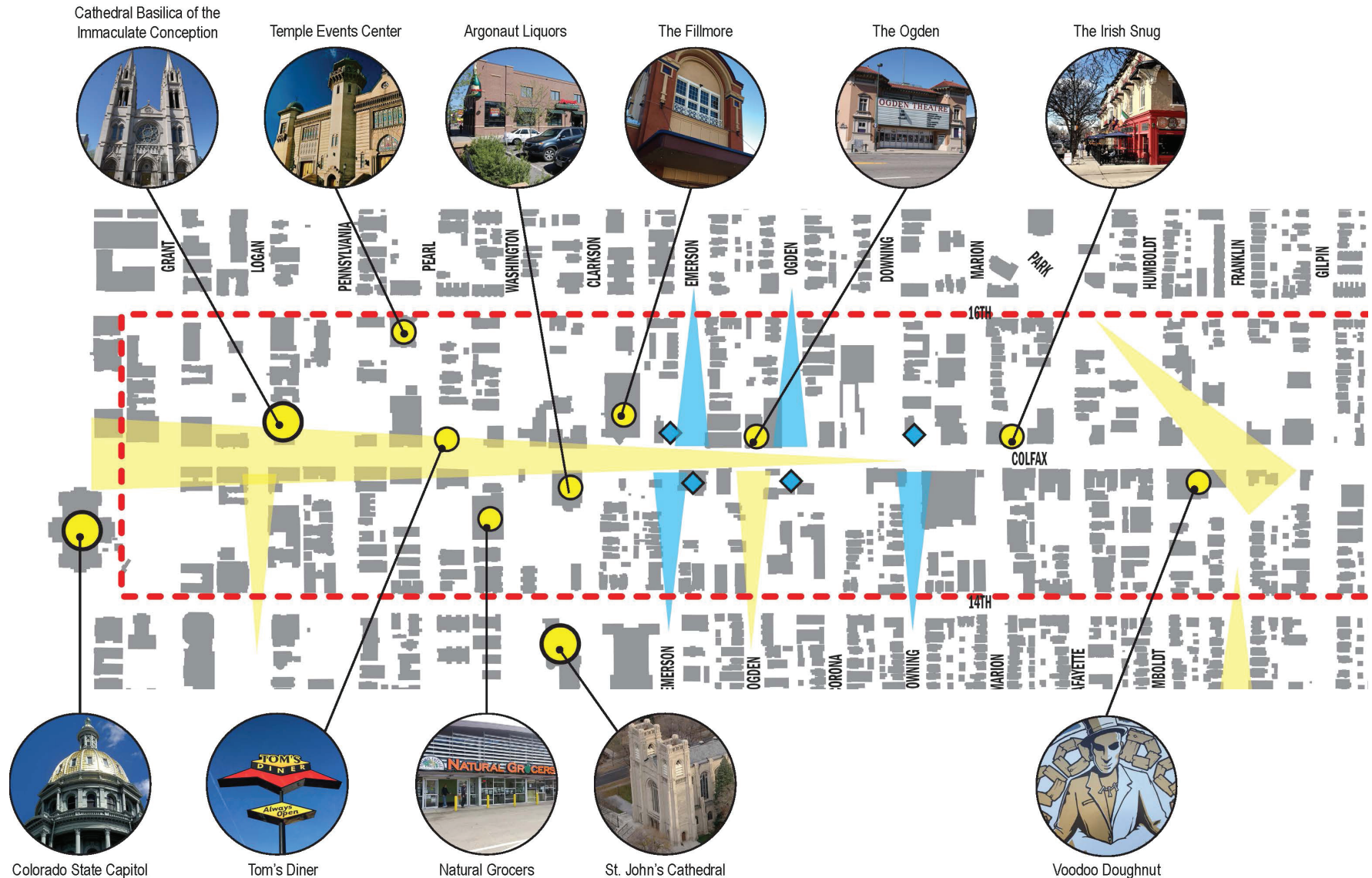
## ICONS AND VISTAS

There are a number of iconic features along Colfax. Monumental historic architecture such as the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception and the State Capitol dominate the character toward the west end of

the study area while the 1960s roadside character and neon signs is more indicative of the corridor as a whole, such as Tom's Diner and its iconic pole sign.

Two iconic music venues are located toward the center of the study area: Fillmore Auditorium and Ogden

Theater. These were built during the movie theater and vaudeville eras with all of the old architectural flourishes of their times. This area is also shaped by a shift in the city's street grid at Colfax, which produces views from Colfax's side streets that focus on Colfax buildings and properties (blue shaded view triangles). One such

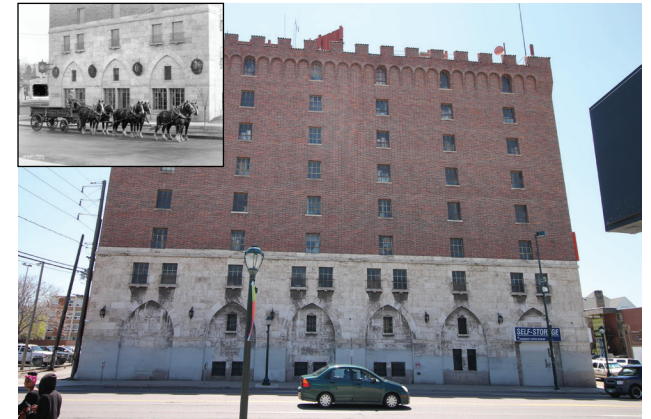
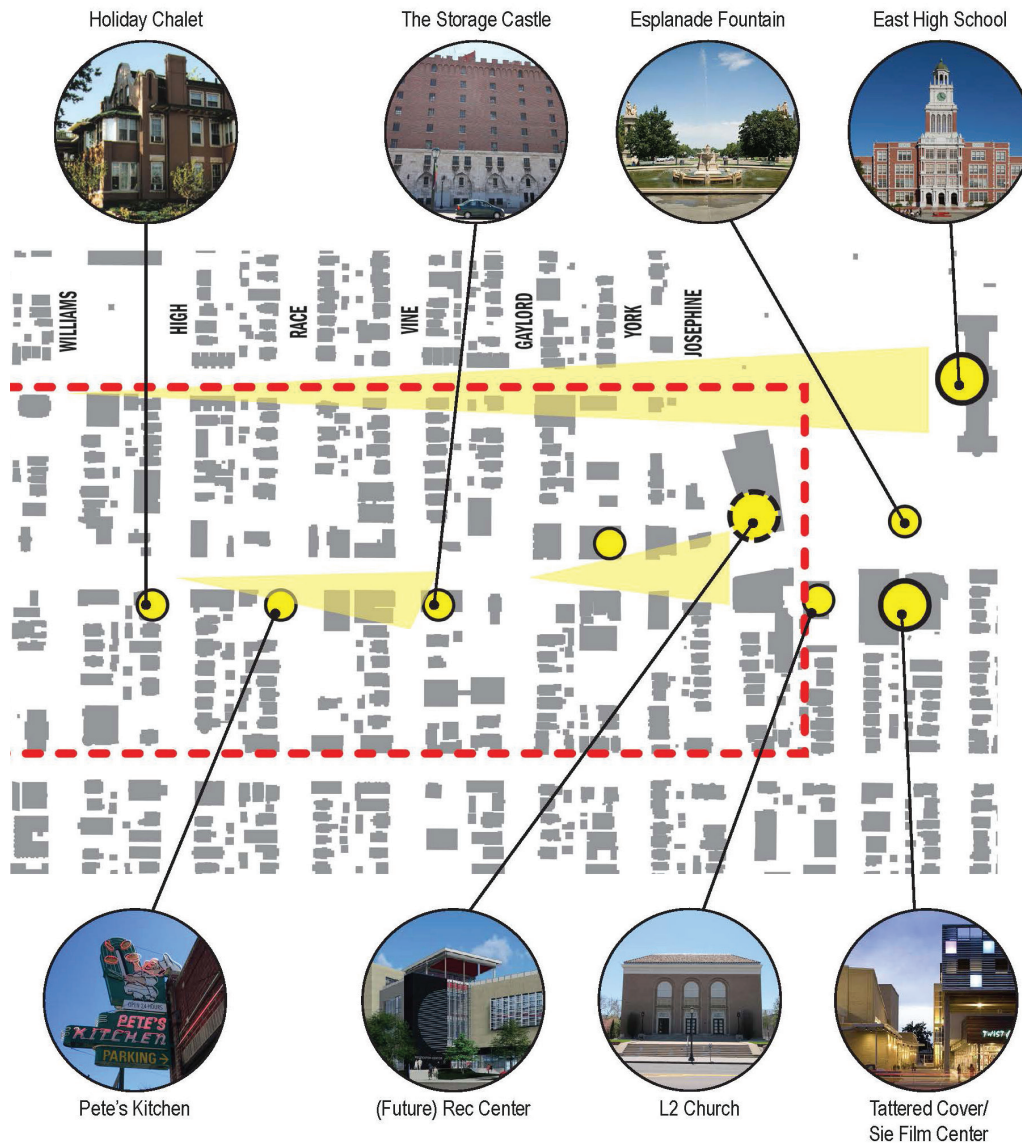


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view from Ogden Street focuses on the Ogden Theater. Other views terminate on underdeveloped properties that argue for future development to provide handsome architectural termini for these views.

Still further east are iconic Colfax “institutions” - beloved places that are uniquely “Colfax” - such as Pete’s Kitchen, Voodoo Doughnut, The Irish Snug, the “Storage Castle”, and more.

New development should consider these important Colfax icons and vistas. While some uses may change over time, these all indicate significance within the history and story-telling of the Colfax corridor.



*The Weicker Depository, or “Storage Castle” was built in 1925 and designed by Fisher & Fisher. It has always been a storage facility. The travertine ground floor could benefit from insterting storefront windows and uses that help activate the ground floor. An historic image shows that it used to have windows on the ground floor.*



*These iconic structures help tell the story of Colfax.*



## LAND USE “STREET SCENES”



Buildings (new and old) that abut the sidewalk edge are reminiscent of the traditional, walkable, “Main Street” era of Colfax and contribute to a positive experience.



Auto-oriented buildings with parking at the sidewalk edge do not positively contribute to the character and make walking unpleasant and uninteresting.



The residential neighborhoods of Capitol Hill that are located just north and south of Colfax should be preserved and enhanced as part of the character of Colfax Ave.



Blank walls negatively contribute to the streetscape by not providing “eyes on the street”



Cafe seating adjacent to the sidewalk helps activate the public realm, provides eyes on the street, and makes walking more pleasant and desirable.



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Before



After



Before



After

Adaptive reuse of old buildings with facade renovations and streetscape improvements can do wonders for improving the public realm.



The John Hand Building at York and Colfax included minor modifications such as adding a new storefront and inserting active restaurant uses with outdoor cafe seating.



New development can add much needed housing to Colfax while keeping notions of the original building like the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless development at Colfax and Pearl Street.



This adaptive reuse and facade renovation took a vacant, out-of-date structure and turned it into a contemporary mixed use building with active ground floor uses and offices on the upper floor.



## LAND USE IMPLEMENTATION TASKS

	DESCRIPTION:	DUTY:	ACTION ITEMS FOR BID:
<b>PRE-CONSTRUCTION PHASE: 2017 - Design, Documentation and Mobilization Phase</b>			
<b>LU.1 - ZONING AMENDMENTS OR OVERLAY ZONE</b>	<i>Current zoning is proving difficult for developers who say that Colfax demands more flexibility due to its complexity, unique character and lot sizes. This may be causing people to look elsewhere for reinvestment. Therefore, Colfax Ave should lobby for revised zoning that encourages reinvestment in the corridor, rather than discouraging it.</i>	CPD CC	<i>Meet with CPD to understand what their plans are for any zoning amendments to Main Street zoning that would effect Colfax. Discuss challenges and potential solutions outlined in this chapter. Lobby other Colfax Avenue BIDs to participate in the process as well as receiving City Council backing.</i>
<b>LU.2 - HISTORIC STRUCTURE SURVEY</b>	<i>Having knowledge about significant structures along the corridor is important. An historic survey would benefit the storytelling aspect of the streetscape design and future redevelopment opportunities.</i>	HD	<i>Meet with CPD to discuss their interest in developing design guidelines for the corridor. The BID could also move forward with voluntary guidelines that could be implemented by BID and monitored through a voluntary design review committee. Sometimes voluntary guidelines can be used as an incentive for a developer as a request from the City.</i>
<b>LU.3 - DESIGN OVERLAY DISTRICT / DESIGN GUIDELINES</b>	<i>In addition to amending the zoning code to be more flexible, creating design guidelines that assist developers with appropriate methods for maintaining character, providing sensitive transitions to neighborhoods, telling the “Colfax story”, and addressing streets and alleys appropriately would greatly benefit the future of Colfax.</i>	CPD BID	<i>Meet with CPD to explore a Design Overlay District for Colfax.</i>
<b>ONGOING: As Resources Become Available or Properties Redevelop</b>			
<b>LU.4 - FACILITATE PROPERTY ASSEMBLAGE</b>	<i>One of the biggest barriers to redevelopment is lack of substantial assembled property. By facilitating property assemblage, there will be more developable land.</i>	BID	<i>BID should serve as a liaison to property owners interested in developing or selling their properties. Finding adjacent property owners who may be willing to sell and marketing to developers should be a priority to facilitating positive change along the corridor. In particular, the blocks between Clarkson and Downing on the south side of Colfax could be a catalyst.</i>

PW = Public Works Department  
 BID = Colfax Ave Business Improvement District  
 CDOT = Colorado Department of Transportation

DDP = Downtown Denver Partnership  
 RTD = Regional Transportation District  
 CPD = Community Planning and Development

PR = Parks and Recreation Department  
 CC = City Council  
 HD = Historic Denver