Red Fields to Green Fields
National Research Project – City of Denver

Team Members

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Park System Background
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Park Land Statistics

• Approximately 240 parks and natural areas, equaling 6,000 acres of park land within the city limits.
• Annual operating budget of $24 million with an additional $10 million budgeted for capital improvement projects (includes any land acquisition)
• Approximately 10 acres of park land per 1,000 residents in Denver. Represents a relatively average ratio for an intermediate density city (Trust for Public Land).
• Approximately 6% of Denver city area consists of park land. Represents the bottom third of cities for an intermediate density city (Trust for Public Land).
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Mountain Parks & Natural Areas

• 14,000 acres of mountain open space land outside the Denver city limits
• Iconic park destinations utilized by residents throughout Colorado.
• Planned by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and a strong Mayor Speer in the early 1900’s.
• Represents one of the first municipal open space preservation programs in the Country.
• Mountain Parks funding competes with City Parks funding & acquisition
Key Issues & Constraints

- Rapidly growing population expected to continue over next 20 years.
- New zoning code in Denver will increase residential density in areas already underserved by parks.
- Limited development regulation to ensure adequate park land dedication or funding in lieu of.
- Denver has no dedicated funding source for park land acquisition.
- Land acquisition must compete internally against all capital improvements and the mountain park system.

![Graph showing Acres of Park per 1,000 Residents from 1860 to 2000](image)
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Key Opportunities

• The geographic areas most desired for park land are also those occupied by underutilized commercial and industrial land along the South Platte River and planned light rail system (FastTracks).
• Denver’s economy remains relatively strong. Lower unemployment rate than most areas of the country (7%) and real estate values remain relatively stable (also a constraint).
• Strong political and citizen support for expanding the park system.
• Clear recent examples (particularly along the South Platte River) of major park projects which have transformed industrial land into park land, spurring major economic development ($5 billion in new commercial/residential in LoDo).
• Significant outside funding sources available for parks in Colorado (Great Outdoors Colorado – Lottery Funds)
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Key Opportunities – Land & Jobs

- Land values in Denver’s four geographic “focus areas” identified for the Red Fields to Green Fields Project range from $70/sq ft-$3/sq ft.
- Assuming 60% of $2.5 billion would be used for acquisition ($1.5 billion), and an average value in the “focus areas” of $10/sq ft…… Denver could acquire approximately **3,500 acres of new park land**.
- This increase would represent a **60% increase in park land** and bring Denver’s ratio of park land per 1,000 residents from 10 acres to 16 acres per 1,000.
- It has taken **50 years** for Denver to acquire it’s last 3,500 acres of park land.
- $500 million (20% of $2.5 billion) spent on design and construction of future park land could add as many as 14,000 jobs in Denver (FHWA). Does not accounts for any multiplier effect or indirect jobs.
- One park maintenance employee per 20 acres of formal parks (Denver standard) would equate to an additional 175 park maintenance-related jobs.
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Park Acquisition Focus Area

South Platte River Corridor
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“Legacy Park” – An Example of Potential Public/Private Partnerships
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Public Private Partnership Opportunities – “Legacy Park”
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Park Master Plans Ready for Implementation:

- South Platte River North Plan
- South Platte River South Plan
- Legacy Park Master Plan
- Cherry Creek Greenway Plan
- Stapleton Redevelopment Plan
- Denver Gulches Master Plan
- Multiple individual park plans
- Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan

*No city-wide parks acquisition plan to date
(This project would spur the development of such a plan !)
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Next level of detail to be answered:

Making the case for funding a transformative real estate solution

1. Communicating the current condition
   – Capture what really matters to your city in respect to economic development, real estate and parks.
   – Do not hesitate to include locally relevant data that does not appear to fit in the playbook.

2. Visioning what is possible
   – Each city has received a recommended financial allotment. Think big, use the allotted money or justify the correct amount.
   – The allotment was recommended to be allocated 60% to acquisition, 20% to demolition/design/construction and 20% to O&M/Security. Cover all of these costs and reallocate if appropriate for your city.

3. Forecasting the impact.
   – How might this project roll out in your city? What is the Governance model?
   – Provide a transformative vision preferably using shovel ready or conceptual projects.
   – Support the case with strong numbers for land acquisition, project cost, jobs created, economic impact, etc… (See outline for more possible metrics)