

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

# Pillar of Fire Site Westminster, Colorado



Urban Land  
Institute

# Pillar of Fire Site Westminster, Colorado

**Strategic Development Advice**

April 21-24, 2008  
An Advisory Services Program Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

# About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

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**T**he 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 40,000 members worldwide, 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

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**T**he 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 three-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; interviews with community representatives; and one day for formulating recommendations. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. At the request of 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, participants in ULI's 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, academics, 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.

## ULI Program Staff

Marta V. Goldsmith  
Senior Vice President, Community/  
Education Provost

Thomas W. Eitler  
Vice President, Advisory Services

Matthew Rader  
Manager, Advisory Services

Caroline M. Dietrich  
Panel Coordinator, Advisory Services

Gwen McCall  
Administrative Manager, Community

Nancy H. Stewart  
Director, Book Program

Laura Glassman, Publications Professionals LLC  
Manuscript Editor

Betsy VanBuskirk  
Art Director

Martha Loomis  
Desktop Publishing Specialist/Graphics

Kim Rusch  
Graphics

Craig Chapman  
Director, Publishing Operations

# Acknowledgments

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**O**n behalf of the Urban Land Institute, the panel thanks the city of Westminster and Delta Investments, Inc., for the invitation to assist them in reaching an accord to allow the development of the Pillar of Fire property to go forward.

The panel extends special thanks to the many city of Westminster officials who participated in this panel, including J. Brent McFall, City Manager; John F. Carpenter, Director of Community Development; Bill Walenczak, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Libraries; Hazel Cho, Planner II; Doug Hall, Deputy Chief of Administration (Fire); Dave Downing, City Engineer; Andrew Hawthorn, City Civil Engineer; and Rich Clark, City Utilities Operations Manager; as well as to Dr. Roberta Selleck, Superintendent of Adams County School District 50.

The panel sincerely thanks the members of the Delta Investments, Inc., development team who participated in this panel, including Chris Fellows, The Fellows Companies; Robyn Buschar, Linda Sweetman, and Lauren Balsley, TerraVisions, LLC; Peter Calthorpe and Roger Hodges, Calthorpe Associates; Mark W. Johnson and J. J. Folsom, Civitas; Thomas J. Ragonetti, Otten,

Johnson, Robinson, Neff & Ragonetti, P.C.; Michael Rinner, The Genesis Group; and Sarah Spencer-Workman, JēHN Engineering; as well as Ann Ragsdale, project neighbor.

The candid insights, desires, documentation, and expertise offered by all of these stakeholders are an integral part of the panel's research and deliberations and form the basis for many of the panel's recommendations.

The panel must thank Calthorpe Associates for its willingness to incorporate the panel's ideas into the work previously performed at the developer's behest and submitted to the city. These new drawings, used throughout the panel's presentation and this report, show as clearly as possible the panel's concepts for modifying the submitted development plan. Although Peter Calthorpe appeared to be in agreement with many of the panel's suggestions incorporated into the drawings by his firm, the panel takes full responsibility for these recommendations.

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# ULI Panel and Project Staff

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## **Panel Chair**

Zane Segal  
Project Director  
Zane Segal Projects  
Houston, Texas

Melina Duggal  
Senior Principal  
RCLCO  
Orlando, Florida

## **Panel Members**

Morey Bean  
Chief Executive Officer  
Colorado Architectural Partnership, LLP  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Michael D. Beyard  
Senior Resident Fellow and ULI/Martin  
Bucksbaum Chair for Retail and Entertainment  
ULI—the Urban Land Institute  
Washington, D.C.

## **ULI Project Staff**

Matthew Rader  
Manager, Advisory Services

# Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

**M**arket preferences in Colorado's Front Range, including metropolitan Denver, continue to favor sustainable, mixed-use developments, particularly those close to existing or planned transit stations. In response, greenfield and brownfield developments throughout the region are making their mix of uses more dense and diverse. The City Council of Westminster, Colorado, advanced this trend by passing the Design Guidelines for Traditional Mixed-Use Neighborhood Developments (TMUND) in 1999.

The Pillar of Fire development is proposed for approximately 236 acres in seven noncontiguous parcels located in the city of Westminster that are currently owned by the Pillar of Fire Church. Among the largest infill greenfield properties available in the Front Range, the proposed project site is located in the southern part of the city of Westminster, about one mile north of the intersection of U.S. Highway 36 and Federal Boulevard, and two miles west of the intersection of Interstate 25 and West 84th Avenue. The panel identified a three-mile radius surrounding the Pillar of Fire site as the study area.

Of the seven parcels that compose the Pillar of Fire site, the central tracts (Parcels C and D) make up an approximately 145-acre block bounded by Federal Boulevard, West 84th Avenue, Lowell Boulevard, and West 88th Avenue. Parcels A and B lie to the southwest, straddling Bradburn Drive. Parcels E and F lie to the east, at the southeast corners of Federal Boulevard, West 88th Avenue, and West 84th Avenue, respectively. Parcel G is farther east along the south line of a proposed continuation of West 88th Avenue.

Some areas in the southern part of the city of Westminster, including properties close to the Pillar of Fire site, are experiencing degradation of their housing value, disinvestment in aging housing stock, and real and perceived increases in crime.



## The Pillar of Fire Project

Delta Investments, Inc., has proposed two development scenarios for the site, both described by the developer as sustainable, transit-oriented, mixed-use, traditional neighborhood design (TND) projects. One scenario allows up to 2,482 residential units and 144,600 square feet of retail and commercial space. The alternate scenario converts an area of multifamily residential into office/flex space, allowing up to 2,063 residential units and 314,500 square feet of retail, commercial, and office space.

Delta Investments participated in the city of Westminster's growth management contest in January 2007 and in March 2007 received 1,406.6 service commitments for the Pillar of Fire project, the equivalent of 2,406 residential units as proposed with the TMUND application. Service commitment awards are conditional upon city approval of the official development plan and do not

Regional map. Westminster is an inner-ring suburb located northwest of Denver.

guarantee density or number of units. Following the competition, Delta Investments continued to engage Calthorpe Associates of Berkeley, California, and Civitas, Inc., of Denver, Colorado, to design the project. Over the next year, the team developed the required materials to request (a) rezoning of the property to a planned unit development (PUD), (b) minor annexation, (c) a comprehensive plan amendment, and (d) preliminary development plan approval. The sponsor formally presented the project to city staff in January 2008 and held a design charrette in February 2008.

The developer and the city held multiple discussions and meetings. City staff members held the position that the proposed project exceeds the densities allowed under the established zoning and comprehensive plan. They also felt that the plan should be changed as follows:

- Contain a larger single-family residential component;
- Feature architecture that reflects the Westminster University “castle” located on nearby Crown Point;
- Contain a significant retail/commercial component with a “Main Street” character;
- Increase the park and open-space dedication to the full amount required by the city’s public land dedication requirements, and relocate the park and open-space dedications to sites preferred by the city;
- Include a school land dedication rather than fees-in-lieu; and
- Increase the setbacks and land dedications along Federal Boulevard, a major arterial street.

## **The Panel’s Assignment**

The city of Westminster and Delta Investments agreed to jointly sponsor a ULI Advisory Services panel to gain strategic advice on the property’s development that would help them overcome their differences and benefit from their vested interest in the Pillar of Fire site. The sponsors asked the panel to analyze the market potential of the site and, based on this potential, to make recommendations on the proposed land use plan, mix of uses, density, scope and location of open space and park dedications, and size and location of a school-site dedication; the requested street-widening dedications and setbacks; fair sharing of off-site infrastructure expenses; and the project’s overall effect on the surrounding community. The panel also considered how the area would be affected by failure to develop the site.

The sponsors also requested that the panel identify strategies for creating a sense of place while improving nearby retail, connecting to the proposed commuter-rail stop south of the site on Federal Boulevard, and benefiting Saint Anthony North Hospital. The sponsors asked the panel to recommend development strategies that would enable the project to achieve a critical mass to create economic development opportunities, encourage revitalization of adjacent neighborhoods, and achieve the financial viability required for the project to proceed.

# Market Potential

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**T**he site offers many clear advantages: significant enough scale to allow a scope of development that can truly be catalytic to its area; exceptional views of the Rocky Mountains, downtown Denver, and even Pikes Peak; and convenient connections to U.S. Highway 36, Interstate 25, and the planned commuter rail station at 70th Avenue and Irving Street. The site benefits from extensive recreational amenities offered by the city of Westminster and convenient access to cultural amenities in Denver.

Nevertheless, several market and environmental factors challenge development at the site. The current downturn in the local and national housing market will likely test marketing efforts. Particularly in light of the deteriorating financial and housing crises, the very high price of the land challenges the project's feasibility. Renegotiation of the purchase price to a lower basis may be the only way to secure financing for the project, even with the compromises between the city and developer proposed in this report. Additionally, the site's fragmentation into seven parcels decreases the ability to create critical mass. Adjacent uses, including a deteriorated mobile-home park and adult businesses, create an unwelcoming approach to the site.

Some of the proposed product types are not fully tested in the local Westminster market. Although planners and developers prefer the sustainability and financial feasibility of higher density, consumers may not accept so much attached product. The high land costs also require the developer to pursue higher densities to justify the project and the price points of the units once they are built.

The local neighborhoods surrounding the site have a mixture of older, single-family detached housing in a fair state of repair and an array of multifamily options ranging from newer housing for seniors to recently renovated condominium conversions to poorly maintained apartment complexes. The panel felt the nearby mobile-home

park would make an excellent redevelopment site after the Pillar of Fire project is in progress.

## Branding

The panel recommends branding the project with something other than "Pillar of Fire," because that name has connotations not particularly relevant to real estate development and marketing. The panel selected "Crown Point" as a working title only, adopting the name of the promontory crowned by the "castle," Westminster's iconic historic landmark.

The panel believes that a project name that demonstrates a respect for history will be important in successfully marketing the project. Additionally, the panel felt strongly that the project would need a mix of uses promoting a walkable lifestyle and must offer a critical mass to create a unique sense of place. In short, density creates opportunity.

If done well, the project should give southern Westminster a new image as a commercial and residential destination. The proposed development provides an excellent opportunity to diversify income levels, product types, and family size in south Westminster without any dislocation. Diversifying south Westminster will help fight deterioration of the existing neighborhoods. The new project could create a positive ripple effect on housing values in the surrounding neighborhoods. Because the property tax rate is statutorily very low, an increase in housing values will not force poor or older residents from their existing homes.

## Residential Market

The site's potential residential market includes a range of buyer and renter profiles (Figure 1). The panel identified two primary target markets: (a) young singles and couples throughout the region who prefer a lifestyle emphasizing walkability in an amenitized location, and (b) local

**Figure 1  
Recommended Target Market Audiences**

Market Audience	Regional Young Singles and Couples	Local Move-Down Buyers/ Empty Nesters	Local Families	Regional Families
Depth of Demand	High	Low	Moderate	High
Ability to Attract	Moderate	High	Moderate	Low
Ability to Afford	Very High	High	Moderate	High
Housing Preferences	Townhouse, Condominium, Rental Apartment	Condominium, Assisted Living	Single-Family Detached, Townhouse	Single-Family Detached
Overall Opportunity	High	High	Moderate	Low

**Figure 2  
Benchmarking Pillar of Fire’s Demographics**

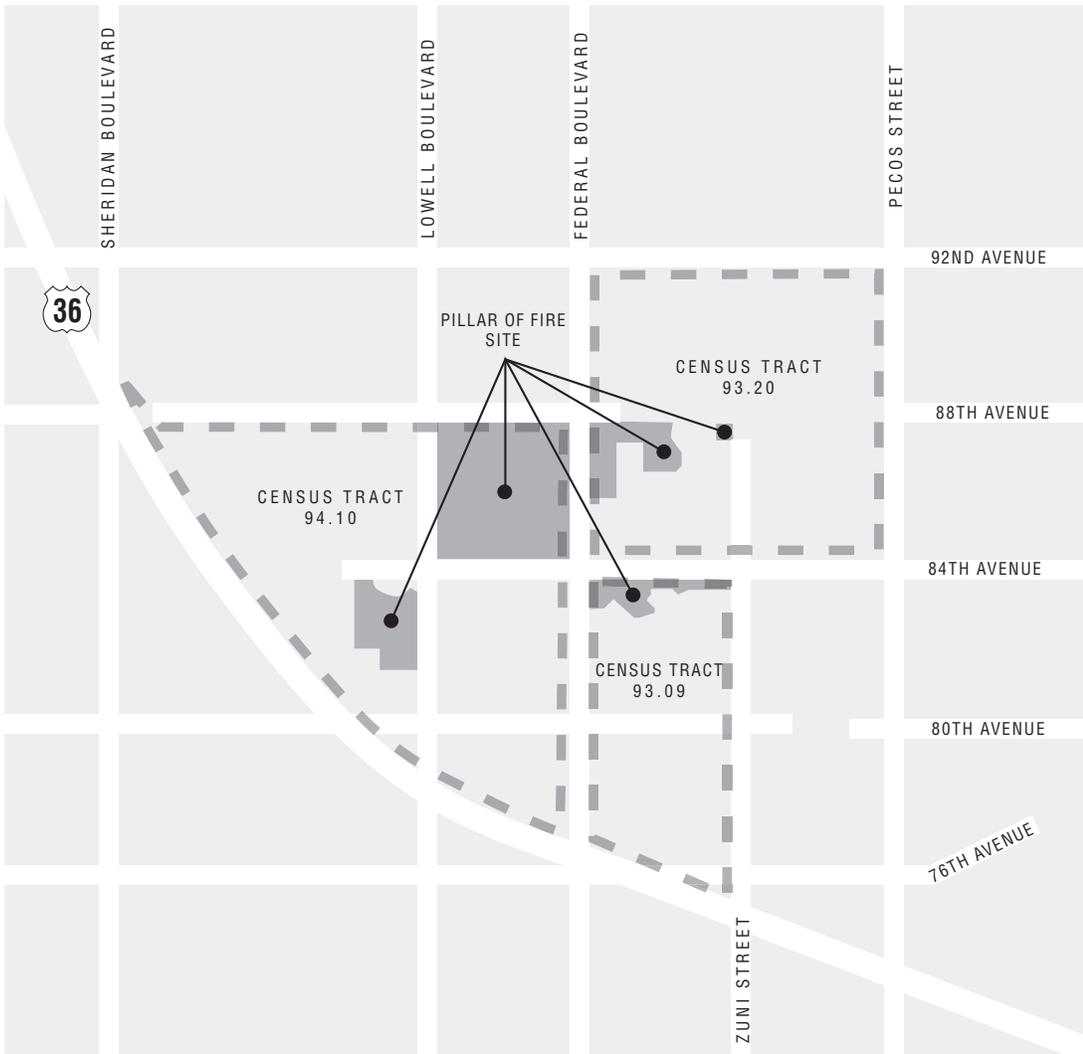
Geographic Area	Owner-Occupied Housing	Hispanic Population	Average Household Income	Ride Transit to Work	Median Housing Value
Census Tract 94.01	77%	25%	\$60,000	4%	\$178,000
Census Tract 93.09	62%	43%	\$53,000	5%	\$176,000
Census Tract 93.20	56%	38%	\$37,000	8%	\$54,000
City of Westminster	70%	20%	\$78,000	4%	\$228,000
Denver MSA	68%	23%	\$79,000	4%	\$243,000

Source: Claritas.

move-down buyers and empty nesters wishing to simplify their lifestyles and recover equity from their current homes. Other, smaller markets may include nontraditional families, such as single-parent families, who may benefit from the mix of uses and reduced reliance on cars for recreation and shopping, and local and regional families.

Demographics in the census tracts adjacent to the site do not support the current proposed housing price points; however, the land cost justifies the proposed price points. Nevertheless, incomes and housing values in adjacent census tracts fall below the median household income and housing value for the city of Westminster and the Denver Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

Marketing the project successfully will require amenities attractive to an urban audience. The site’s location in an inner-ring suburb, convenient to both Denver and Boulder, could attract both city dwellers seeking a lower-density location and suburbanites seeking a location closer to urban activity. Key amenities that will attract the target demographics include a central park for active and passive recreation, a walkable design that enables residents to explore the neighborhood in safety, and a recreational clubhouse and pool. The proposed retail/mixed-use component will serve as both an amenity and a service to the larger community. To succeed, the retail must have critical mass and good design.



Pillar of Fire site and surrounding census tracts.

The project should garner premiums for views, traditional neighborhood design, and quality of execution. Its location will require that it be positioned at price points about 15 percent to 20 percent less than Bradburn, a TND located in a higher-profile location in northern Westminster. At the same time, the Pillar of Fire project should be able to receive a 5 percent to 15 percent premium over similarly executed conventional communities in the general vicinity and must be positioned at a significant price premium compared to aging housing stock in nearby neighborhoods. Internally, units oriented to parks and open space should be priced at a premium, and buildings with views of the Rocky Mountains should command the highest premium. If the city appropriates all

of the prime-view sites for parks and open space, which would do away with these potential premiums, the financial viability of the entire project is in doubt.

#### Density

The panel felt that the proposed density and mix of uses are in line with comparable mixed-use, transit-oriented, TNDs and town center projects nationally. The overall density of 7.1 multifamily dwelling units per gross acre is below the 8.1 dwelling units per gross acre average documented in Figure 3. At .19, the project's floor/area ratio, calculated as the total gross square footage of a project's improvements divided by the total gross square footage of the land, is the lowest among

**Figure 3  
Benchmarking Density against National Projects**

Project Name	Location	Acreage	Retail Space (Square Feet)	Office Spage (Square Feet)	Multifamily (Units)	Floor/Area Ratio	Multifamiy Units per Gross Acre
Contra Costa Centre	Walnut Creek, California	18	42,000	375,000	360	1.00	20.0
Mizner Park	Boca Raton, Florida	30	230,000	260,000	272	0.64	9.1
Phillips Place	Charlotte, North Carolina	35	145,000	45,000	402	0.47	11.5
Abacoa Town Center	Jupiter, Florida	35	189,000	622,000	412	0.83	11.8
Addison Circle	Dallas, Texas	80	110,000	39,000	1,336	0.43	16.7
Riverside	Atlanta, Georgia	85	25,000	225,000	537	0.23	6.3
Redmond Town Center	Redmond, Washington	120	400,000	700,000	200	0.30	1.7
King Farm	Rockville, Maryland	430	120,000	3,200,000	3,200	0.35	7.4
Averages		104	157,625	683,250	840	0.53	8.1
Land Use Mix			9%	38%	47%	–	–
<b>Pillar of Fire Site</b>	<b>Westminster, Colorado</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>117,500</b>	<b>197,000</b>	<b>1,673</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>7.1</b>
Land Use Mix			6%	10%	84%	–	–

Source: RGLCO.

all the samples in Figure 3. For every 100 square feet of land in the Pillar of Fire site, there will be 19 square feet of sellable or rentable buildings.

**Residential Market Conclusions**

In the panel’s view, the proposed development program is financially challenging, and the city’s additional requests will demonstrably weaken the project’s financial feasibility if fully enforced. Among major financial issues are high development costs both on and off site that are unknown at this time, a projected rate of absorption in the pro forma that appears to be too aggressive, and anticipated price points that appear to be too high.

The panel recommends opening the project with product marked to the current market and escalating prices over time as the project changes the market perception—and reality—of its area. Market value can be created over time, but initial pricing that is too high will strangle the project. The timing of the sale of the view-premium lots and units will be critical to the eventual success of the Pillar of Fire project. They should not be sold off too soon and too cheaply, although the temptation may exist to do so.

# Commercial Development Strategy

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The stakeholder interviews provided the panel a clearer understanding of the developer's financial requirements, the city's rights and prerogatives, and the market realities. Using this information and additional research, the panel formulated a series of strategies that could increase the viability of the proposed development plan. The panel's specific plan modifications and observations seek to improve the project and make it more beneficial to the surrounding community. They include creation of a retail district and a medical district; placement and scale of open spaces, public parks, and schools; compatibility of adjacent uses; potential for new and upgraded product types; balancing demand for street right-of-way dedications, amenity zones, and infrastructure expenditures; means for fairly sharing the funding for the on-site and off-site infrastructure improvements; and even recommendations for additional land acquisitions.

## Retail District

Suggestions for creating a successful retail, office, and mixed-use zone to anchor the project come first. Although the idea may be counter-intuitive to the development cliché "retail follows rooftops," the panel recommends that the Pillar of Fire development begin with the construction of the retail and mixed-used area at the 100 percent corner, the intersection of Federal Boulevard and West 84th Avenue. New construction at this most highly visible and accessible location will signal to the community that the area is about to undergo a significant upgrade.

Although a supportable retail development program is easy to talk about, it is not as easy to do. Many retailers who have leased in TNDs and transit-oriented developments have not fared as well as hoped. High traffic counts on Federal Boulevard and existing retail uses bolster the

commercial potential of this corner, however. Over time, the panel recommends bringing the underperforming shopping center across the street into the project, as discussed later.

The project's commercial district should be positioned to reinforce Federal Boulevard's retail character and to anchor the revitalization of south Westminster, even before the advent of commuter rail. It cannot depend solely on the occupants of the Pillar of Fire site, especially in the beginning. Therefore, its target market will be the 150,000 people already living within a three-mile radius of the site. The size and character of the retail district proposed by the developer will be a small increase in the 7.4 million square feet of existing retail in Westminster. The district will not try to compete with the three transit-oriented development projects proposed for the city's commuter-rail stops, the Westminster Mall redevelopment, the new Wal-Mart, the Orchards, or other major projects in the north part of the city. The retail district should be designed as a destination with both main-street and auto-oriented formats and provide easy access by foot, bicycle, automobile, or bus.

The panel felt the proper use for the northwest corner of Federal and 84th would be a community retail center of 125,000 to 150,000 square feet, a little larger than the developer proposed. The center should include a supermarket anchor of 50,000 to 75,000 square feet and another 75,000 square feet of in-line or big-box neighborhood-serving retail. The panel encourages the developer to persuade the functionally obsolete supermarket located across Federal Boulevard to relocate to the site and complement it with a drugstore, flower shop, food and beverage outlets, and other daily shopping uses. The panel endorses the siting of the supermarket at the rear of the district, partially screened from Federal Boulevard. The

retail uses must be of higher density and quality than those in Bradburn’s main-street retail area.

Housing and professional offices should be located above the in-line shops and, if possible, even over the supermarket. Research shows that a supermarket anchor results in a 15 percent premium in rental rates. The residential and office uses over stores should extend to the first greenbelt, thus expanding pedestrian access to the retail district from the multifamily area to the north. If successful, the mixed-use component could continue westward into the areas designated for flex/live/work spaces, which are also important as a buffer between the retail district and the lower-density housing surrounding the central park.

Specific strategies to create a sense of place or “there” in the retail district are much more than site amenities, landscaping, or physical improvements, although these are important and must be of high quality. A strong public environment should be created with both attractive hardscaping and sustainable softscaping; diverse and frequent event programming in public gathering spaces; public art, banners, fountains, and seating; and a variety of colorful, architecturally varied storefront designs and signage. Outdoor dining areas are a significant plus. Because successful retail and restaurants require people to be in the area at night, the vertical integration of higher-density housing typologies—up to four stories—directly above the shops will contribute critically to the liveliness and profitability of the retailer environment.

The panel recommends including the existing strip center and vacant land on the east side of Federal Boulevard in the site. Together, these two properties amount to almost 15 acres. Redeveloping these parcels in conjunction with the site will establish Federal Boulevard as a walkable, urban retail corridor. Bringing this corner into the Pillar of Fire project will also help link it to the emerging medical district to the immediate east while removing an eyesore that would reflect badly on the new development. The city of Westminster could help with land acquisition, land banking, and even redeveloping the obsolete shopping center.

The panel recommends redeveloping the strip center into a mixed-use project with office, medical, professional, and live/work spaces as well as additional retail and restaurants, if justified by the success of the first phase retail district. Including a significant office component on this site, with buildings as tall as six to eight stories, will take advantage of the excellent views of downtown Denver and will create a strong local employment center that enhances the long-term sustainability of south Westminster. Office use in this location will benefit from its proximity to housing of all price points and sizes. The panel recommends multifamily development for the vacant tract just north of the aging strip, which will tie into the multifamily housing to be located to its north.

Considering the panel’s later recommendations concerning the street widening and amenity zones for Federal Boulevard, imposing a coordinated development pattern on both sides of this thoroughfare all the way from West 84th Avenue to West 88th Avenue would dramatically reinforce the value of the new alignment and would function as a template for further enhancement of Federal Boulevard, both north and south.

## **Medical District**

Already growing through the construction of a new structure on its own property and another new medically oriented building on its periphery, Saint Anthony North Hospital is perceived as a job anchor and community amenity for the Pillar of Fire project. As such, the proposed development should feed off the growing need for medical care nationwide by developing its land across from the hospital for compatible uses, such as medical offices and wellness centers. If the market warrants, these buildings could be mid-rise in height, as high as six or eight stories. This new development should increase the sense of a campus setting for the hospital and reduce the possibility of the hospital’s choosing to relocate.

These office sites, parts of Parcel F, are located along the south line of West 84th Avenue, to the east of the hard corner with Federal, which should be dedicated to the city as a public park. The park will extend down the hill below these

tracts as well, thus ensuring the view corridor from the new office buildings in perpetuity. This high-value, view-oriented commercial development should be a significant contributor to the short-term feasibility of the project as well as to the long-term sustainability of the area in terms of its jobs/housing balance.

Because West 84th Avenue is a high-speed corridor in this area and not conducive to the needs of older or disabled visitors and patients, a traffic signal would be advisable to connect the hospital with the medical office buildings to be built across the street.

Another commercial project tying into the hospital could be an assisted-living or retirement facility located on part of the ten-acre, easternmost section of Parcel E. Assuming the development

would use about five acres, the balance could be dedicated for use as a public park, perhaps where Camenish Park is located immediately to its north. Alternatively, the park portion could be on the southern half of the tract, with the housing complex for seniors wrapping around the park on the north. In either case, the park would provide an amenity for the seniors, and they would provide eyes on the park for security. This park might also prove to be an inducement for the quicker redevelopment of the trailer park, the removal of which would improve the value of the Pillar of Fire site's projects in this sector as well as the value of the medical campus itself.

# Planning and Design

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**T**he panel was presented an early version of the master plan prepared by Calthorpe Associates and Civitas for submission to the city to compare to the revised version that was drawn after discussions with the city. This second plan was the one given to the panel for its consideration, because it is the source of still-considerable disagreement between the developer and the city. The panel has taken the charge both to improve the plan where possible and to structure recommendations about the nonmodified portions of the plan that will help the city and the developer reach agreement on what is best for all parties.

With respect to the master plan presented to the panel, the developer and the city had significant unresolved issues concerning the placement and scale of the parks and open space to be dedicated to the city; the location and size of the school site, if any, to be dedicated to the school district; the specifics of street and amenity-zone dedications and the responsibility for actual construction costs; the setbacks along Federal Boulevard; the overall density, location, and balance of single-family and multifamily areas; the location of the big-box stores within the retail district; and the responsibility for off-site infrastructure costs. Although a wide gulf persisted between the two sponsors' views, thus necessitating ULI's advisory services, the panel believes that its recommendations should serve as a bridge bringing the two parties to a mutual understanding of what is both desirable and achievable.

The panel firmly believes that this project is critical to the revitalization of the southern part of Westminster and the city's best interests lie in pro-actively assisting the developer to make it happen, considering the market realities previously discussed.

The panel strongly disagrees with comments it heard to the effect that if the project does not go forward, nothing would be hurt because the

property would stay in open space. Private open space owned by a religious institution is not an amenity or economic driver for the city, especially when the surrounding area is deteriorating. If nothing is done to reverse the fortunes of this area, the decline will inevitably proceed north into the heart of Westminster.

Neighborhood decline around the site, if it is not preempted by the Pillar of Fire project, will become a significant problem for the city. The panel also believes that the city's efforts to create transit-oriented development in south Westminster will be bolstered by a thriving Pillar of Fire project just to its north, rather than a moribund, decaying area.

The panel does not intend to say that the city should abstain from its duty to ensure the proposed project is well designed and executed, fairly shares the burden of infrastructure needed for the project, and provides amenitized open space for its future residents. In general, however, the panel felt that the city's invocation of its rights to the fullest legal extent, as it has been doing, will kill the project and along with it a strong opportunity to improve south Westminster and the critical Federal Boulevard corridor.

The master plan adjustments proposed by the panel are designed to bridge the disparate points of view between the sponsors while at the same time making the project better and more financially viable. Some of the recommended changes have been highlighted in the section on Commercial Development Strategy.

## Parks and Open Space

The master plan presented to the panel provided for approximately 60 acres of parks and open space, of a total of 236 total acres, or over 25 percent of the total project acreage. The city's formula for determining parks and open-space dedications, based on the projected density of a project,

enables it to request up to 60 acres. The city's major concerns about the current plan are the location of the parks, their minimum size, the types of parks, and whether private parks under the ownership of the homeowners association should count against the total park and open-space dedication.

Because the city's current Master Parks and Recreation Plan notes that the city is deficient by 77 acres in community parks, which are normally 15 to 50 acres in size, the city voiced a primary desire for a regional-scale park of 25 to 35 acres in the project. This same plan also notes that the city is deficient in the number of Little League ballfields, youth soccer fields, play lots, picnic shelters, skate parks, and other amenities. The panel understands and applauds that the city of Westminster has embraced as core values a high level and quality of parks, open space, and recreational opportunities, but the panel questions the validity of requiring such a high percentage of the city's total deficiency in one particular park type to be enforced on one project, especially because a park of this size would threaten the viability of the project.

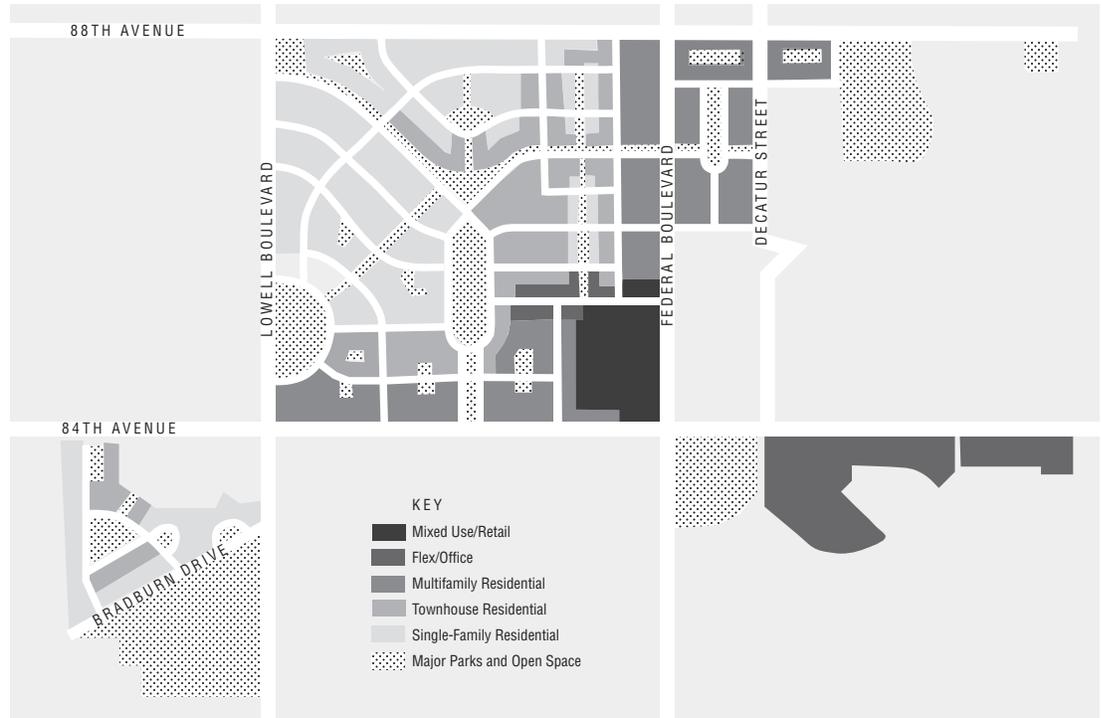
The city has also started refusing to accept park dedications of less than 10 acres, even though an ordinance promulgating this new minimum size has not yet been adopted. The current ordinance allows pocket parks of one-half to five acres and neighborhood parks of five to 15 acres. Notable also is that the TMUND Design Guidelines, under which the developer has submitted the master plan for approval, specifically mention active community parks of between three and 10 acres, neighborhood parks of one-half to three acres, and tot lots as small as 3,000 to 5,000 square feet. It is well accepted in TND design, and is a core organizing principle of the Pillar of Fire project as submitted, that a multiplicity of well-designed parks and open spaces integrated into the neighborhood fabric by hike-and-bike trails is preferable to only large-scale parks scattered at greater distances throughout a community.

Although the panel heard the city's concern about the difficulty of maintaining smaller parks, the panel believes that the benefit of having user-friendly parks laced throughout a neighborhood should be the determining factor. Because the city desires to change the rules concerning minimum-size park dedications, if these smaller parks could



An early version of the master plan for the Pillar of Fire site prepared by Calthorpe Associates.

The sponsor provided this version of the Pillar of Fire master plan for the panel's consideration.



be managed and maintained better by a homeowners association or special district, and if the homeowners association or special district is willing to be responsible for that maintenance, then the panel believes these smaller parks should definitely be counted toward the ordinance dedication, in the Pillar of Fire site and elsewhere.

Private community amenities that are not open to the public, such as the community pool and tennis facility, would not qualify as public parks in this context, but the vast majority of the open spaces proposed in the developer's plan should qualify. This outcome is good neighborhood design and vital to the success of the project.

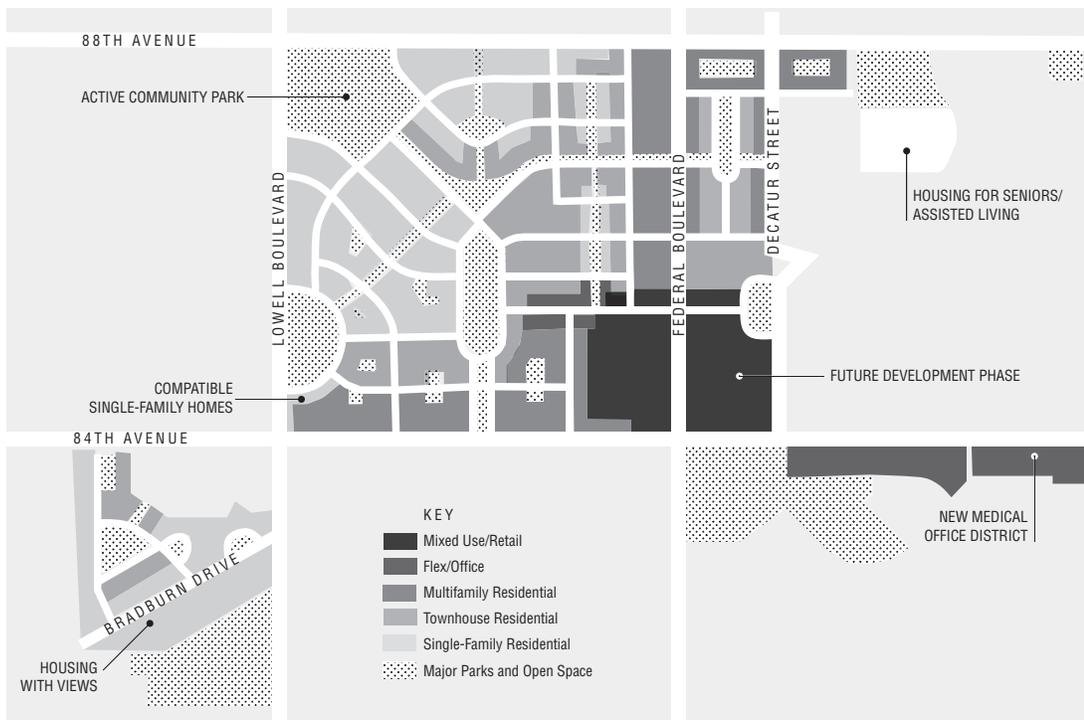
The panel's first specific recommendation on parks and open space is to construct the project's major community park close to the existing educational campus in the area, so that it can be used in conjunction with those schools. The preferred location is the southeast corner of Lowell Boulevard and West 88th Avenue, directly across the street from Flynn Elementary School and a short block from Shaw Heights Middle School.

The proposed park would encompass over 11 acres and could hold two 1.2-acre Little League baseball fields, two 1.7-acre soccer fields, and six tennis courts—a total of 6.8 acres of active uses. These uses would leave room for a public recreation center, picnic shelters, and sufficient parking. The panel recommends installing a flashing school-crossing signal, not an underpass or overpass, to connect the elementary school with the park. The park should not be required to be larger to meet an arbitrary standard category, thereby damaging the potential for the success of the project.

Putting a park of this scale at this location entails the loss of single-family areas to the project, but the panel believes that single-family detached homes on larger lots are the least preferred typology for the Pillar of Fire site and will bring the least value to the developer, so it is a logical trade-off. Still, no viable reason exists for the city to exact a larger park for this location.

The city has requested location of the largest active-use park on the entirety of Parcels A and B, which straddle Bradburn Drive and provide uninterrupted views in both directions from this

The Pillar of Fire master plan revised to reflect the panel's recommendations.



promontory. Based on the city's input, the amount of park space in this area was increased dramatically from the early master plan to the master plan presented to the panel. The panel does not feel the Bradburn Drive area is appropriate for active recreational uses because it is sloped in both directions. The panel recommends using this prime-view site for high-value homes that will improve the project's economic viability.

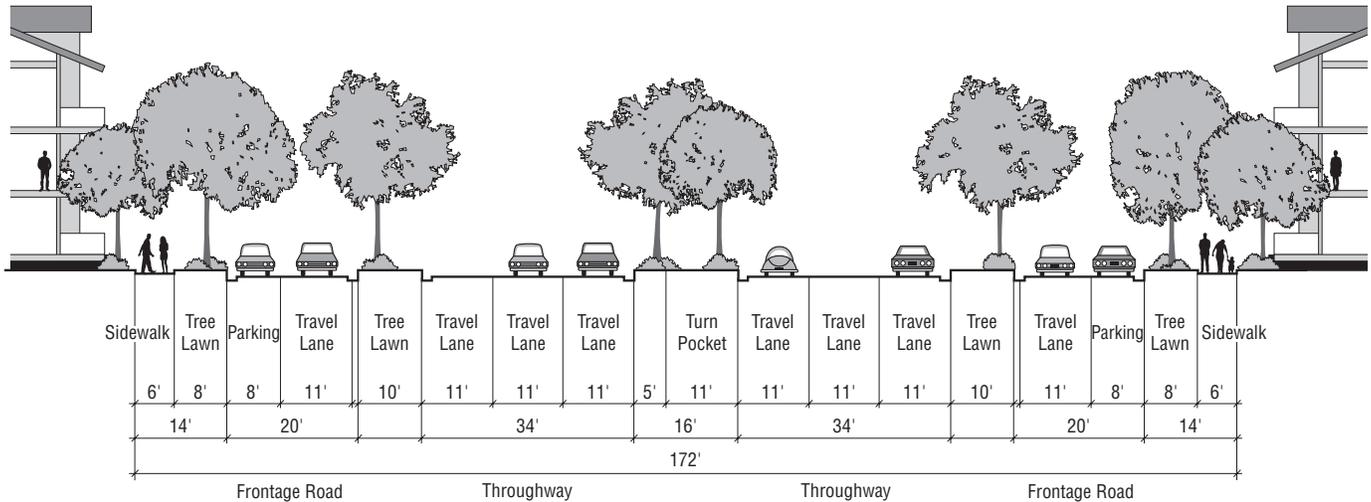
The panel recommends removing the school site from this area entirely and reducing the larger park facing south from 15.66 acres to 10.35 acres. The smaller park will provide significant space for picnicking, disc golf, a dog park, and a play lot. Baseball fields, soccer fields, and tennis courts must be totally flat and would require massive earthmoving and disruption of the view corridors on this site. This 10.35 acres could begin as open space and be turned into a park later, when and if the necessity and city funds appear.

As discussed in the Commercial Development Strategy section, the southeast corner of Federal Boulevard and West 84th Avenue offers prime views to downtown Denver and Pikes Peak. The panel agrees with the dedication of the 6.65 acres

on the hard corner as park or, more likely, open space. The panel also recommends dedicating 6.81 acres south of the proposed medical office district as parkland. These two dedications would yield over 13 contiguous acres and preserve the view corridors for the proposed medical offices and mixed-use buildings on the northeast corner of the intersection, the commercial buildings proposed on the northwest corner of the intersection, and the passing public. The proposed park dedications could tie into Cobblestone Park, increasing the usage of both public spaces.

As discussed before, the panel felt that the ten-acre park shown on the master plan north of Saint Anthony North Hospital would be better used if it were cut in half and the other five acres given over to a housing project for seniors. Additionally, the 1.23-acre parcel at the southwest corner of the extension of West 88th Avenue and Zuni Street should be connected with Bell Roth Park to the north.

The panel's recommendation that Parcel F be used for commercial development results in a



The panel proposes reconfiguring Federal Boulevard into a great street with central traffic lanes and local service roads. The local service roads will buffer development from the through traffic noise but retain an urban street design.

smaller public land dedication than does Parcel F's use for multifamily development. The panel's proposed major park and open-space allocation totals 40.02 acres in four parcels. Smaller privately maintained parks and greenways total 12.67 acres and provide beauty, play areas, and open space throughout the community. The two private recreation centers proposed by the developer would not count as public parks or open space. The panel believes this 52.69 acres is sufficient.

### School Site

The panel does not believe that a school site dedication is warranted. Instead, the panel recommends a cash payment in lieu of a 12-acre site dedication, at \$60,000 per acre for a total of \$720,000, which would better benefit the school district and the project. The cash payment would be due at building permit. The school district could use this money to acquire the out-tract at the southwest corner of Lowell Boulevard and West 88th Avenue, contiguous to Flynn Elementary School, for the eventual expansion or rebuilding of this school. Land appears to be available at the northwest corner of this intersection as well. If the developer creates the proposed 11-acre park on the southeast corner of this intersection, the corner of 88th Avenue and Lowell Boulevard could become an educational and recreational campus connected by the signalized crosswalk previously recommended.

### Compatibility of Uses

In general, the master plan follows the city's recommendation that the single-family areas be placed to the west of the property, near the existing single-family areas, and that the multifamily sites be situated to the east, nearer the majority of existing denser development. The panel's only recommended change to the plan in this respect is to replace the proposed multifamily housing on the northeast corner of Lowell Boulevard and West 84th Avenue with a lower-density residential use.

### Density

The panel believes that the overall density of the project is reasonable and appropriate. Bearing in mind that the city's current zoning allows 3.5 single-family residences per acre on the majority of the site, the panel endorses the plan to make the site a PUD under the city's traditional mixed-use neighborhood development design guidelines.

### Streets and Amenity Zones

Federal Boulevard is the primary road corridor through the property. The city is currently upgrading Federal Boulevard south of the site, although not to the standard the city has requested of the site's developer. After consultation with Calthorpe Associates, the panel recommends, as the city requested, widening of Federal Boulevard

from four to six lanes of through traffic, divided by a 16-foot landscaped median that can hold one left-turn lane where needed. This design will yield a total right-of-way of approximately 84 feet, plus amenity zones on both sides, less than the city has requested, but sufficient to move the traffic in an efficient and attractive manner.

An amenity zone 44 feet wide would exist beyond the back of the curb, on both sides of Federal Boulevard where owned by the developer. The amenity zone would include a ten-foot-wide landscaped buffer next to the through lanes, a two-lane frontage road accommodating one traffic lane and one parallel-parking lane, another landscaped zone, and then a sidewalk fronting the multifamily units.

This configuration yields a significant amenity zone of 44 feet between the through traffic lanes and the multifamily buildings, including two separate tree lines for sound and visual buffering. The panel believes the proposed arrangement provides sufficient buffering. The panel feels the city's requested buffer of 50 feet from the right-of-way or 80 feet from the back of the curb is excessive.

For Lowell Boulevard, the panel recommends increasing the right-of-way from two lanes total to two lanes of through traffic and two parking lanes, as requested by the city. The panel highly recommends reducing the requested amenity zones to a reasonable width; though the panel has not determined what this width should be, it believes that the city is overreaching in its requested widths for these zones. Also, the panel feels that expecting the developer to donate land to provide amenity zones on the opposite side of the

street from the proposed projects is not reasonable or just. This comment applies to West 84th Avenue and West 88th Avenue in addition to Lowell Boulevard. The city should install traffic-calming devices on Lowell Boulevard and a flashing school-crossing signal, not an underpass or overpass, to tie Flynn Elementary School to the proposed park.

For West 84th Avenue, the panel endorses expanding the through lanes from two to four, as requested by the city, but again suggests reducing the width, as indicated previously, of the requested amenity zones on both sides of the avenue. For West 88th Avenue, the panel endorses the extension to Clay Street but does not believe that the project justifies the extension all the way to Zuni Street. Similarly, the panel does not believe that the project justifies the extension of Clay Street to West 88th Avenue unless and until the panel's proposed housing project for seniors is built. East of Federal Boulevard, four lanes are probably fully justified. A traffic study analysis would define whether three lanes (two lanes plus turn pockets) would be a better solution for west of Federal Boulevard.

## **Infrastructure**

The city has requested that the developer pay for many off-site and right-of-way improvements. The panel believes that most of these costs need to be borne by, or shared with, a public entity (that is, the city, the county, a new metropolitan district, or an urban renewal district).

# Implementation: Creating a Partnership

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**T**he on-site and off-site infrastructure costs include new and totally revamped streets and arterials; new, wide sidewalks; underground electrical, sewer, and water utilities; drainage improvements; new or renewed street lighting; park amenities; new landscaping; and new pedestrian and bicycle underpasses. Some of these improvements will primarily benefit the residents and tenants of the project, but the majority will benefit the greater community as much or more than the project itself. Therefore, the panel feels expecting the project developer to pay all such expenses, on top of the quite significant right-of-way, open space, and cash-in-lieu of school-site exactions, is not reasonable, even as amended by the this report's recommendations.

The panel recommends a concerted effort be made to find a cooperative funding mechanism or series of mechanisms that can allow the project to proceed. Chief among these are the formation of a metropolitan district(s) and the creation of an urban renewal district. The former could be used to issue bonds to pay for a portion of the development's share of the agreed-upon infrastructure

needs of the project. The bonds would be repaid by the future users and residents of the project.

The urban renewal district might well be used to acquire and redevelop the old shopping center on the northeast corner of Federal Boulevard and West 84th Avenue, since the city has used this mechanism before in similar circumstances.

The panel is firmly convinced that without a significant lessening of the city's requests for developer-donated and paid-for improvements, and some significant form of public/private partnership resulting in cost sharing, there will be no project. The panel believes that would be a significant loss to the city far in excess of whatever contributions the city might make to help realize the project.

Whatever forms the public/private partnership and funding sharing take, without this cooperation, the project will not proceed.

# About the Panel

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## Zane Segal

*Panel Chair  
Houston, Texas*

A developer, marketing consultant, and licensed real estate broker with Zane Segal Projects, Segal is knowledgeable in mixed-use, residential, commercial, historic, and hospitality properties in both urban and resort locations. He has 30 years of experience in realty venture management, project development, construction, brokerage, and marketing on a range of property types, including development sites, lofts, townhomes, low- and mid-rise condominiums, custom homes, apartments, hotels, retail centers, office buildings, subdivisions, and sports facilities, as well as mixed-use projects incorporating several uses.

Segal has served on the Urban Land Institute Houston District Council board for six years as vice chair of Urban Plan, Advisory Services, and Membership. He has chaired two and served on ten additional ULI Advisory Services panels across the country and has chaired ULI Houston's first two Technical Assistance Program panels and has served on another.

He is a member of the City of Houston Planning Commission Mixed Use/Transit-Oriented Development Committee, chaired its subcommittee on urbanization of the suburbs, served on the advisory committee of Envision Houston Region, and serves on the board of Blueprint Houston. His overseas experience includes five journeys to Europe lasting in excess of a year, nine trips to South America totaling over half a year, two trips to the Middle East and North Africa lasting over five months, and multiple stays in Mexico and the Caribbean.

Segal received a BS in humanities from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a master of fine arts in cinema from the University of Southern California, has studied graduate-level

architecture and planning at the University of Houston, and was first licensed as a real estate agent in 1982. He has often spoken, written for publication, and been quoted by the media concerning real estate, development, urban design, and the arts. He is an avid traveler, photographer, writer, and runner.

## Morey Bean

*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

Founding partner of the Colorado Springs-based Colorado Architecture Partnership, Bean is an architect, urban designer, and city planner with experience ranging from the design and execution of public art to new urbanist community design.

Colorado's Architect of the Year for 1999 and past president of the Colorado South Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), Bean was instrumental in producing the nationally recognized Great Streets/Great Skyline urban design charrette sponsored by AIA150, the American Institute of Architects Sesquicentennial project, the catalyst for the AIA's America's Favorite Architecture Featured Content Layer on Google Earth in cooperation with Google. He is town architect for the Lowell Neighborhood, a new urbanist traditional neighborhood development in downtown Colorado Springs designed by Duany Plater-Zyberk.

Bean serves on the Business and Community Alliance for Colorado College and on the College of Education Advisory Board at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. He is also featured on the inaugural webisode of the "Shape of America," an AIA blog discussing America's favorite architecture, starting with the Empire State Building ([www.ShapeofAmerica.org](http://www.ShapeofAmerica.org)).

Some of Bean's notable architecture and urban design projects include the Poet Lofts Building at the Lowell Neighborhood; the Visitor Center

expansion at the Great Sand Dunes National Park; Prestwick Neighborhood Plan, Springboro, Ohio; and Monument Village Community Plan, Monument, Colorado.

He has served on ULI Advisory Services panels from Anchorage, Alaska, to Daytona Beach, Florida, and as a ULI Mayors Forum panelist dealing with public art as a catalyst for urban redevelopment.

### **Michael D. Beyard**

*Washington, D.C.*

Beyard is an urban planner and economist with more than 20 years' experience in the related fields of real estate development, land use planning, and economic development. His experience is focused in both the United States and Europe on commercial and retail development, shopping centers, e-commerce, location-based entertainment, and downtown revitalization.

At the Urban Land Institute, Beyard is Senior Resident Fellow for Retail and Entertainment Development. In his role as senior resident fellow, Beyard is a featured speaker in the United States, Europe, and South America on retail, entertainment, and downtown development issues, and he is a widely quoted expert in national and international media as well as American and European planning and real estate journals.

Before coming to ULI, Beyard was a senior consultant in the fields of urban planning and real estate development. He spent ten years at Booz Allen & Hamilton, Planning Research Corporation, and Gladstone Associates, advising both public and private clients on market analysis, feasibility, and development planning. Beyard has been honored with membership in Lambda Alpha, the International Land Economics Honorary Society, and was an appointed member of the Mayor's Interactive Downtown Task Force in Washington,

D.C. He holds a BA in international economics with honors from Rutgers College and a master's degree in urban planning and development from Cornell University, where he was elected to Phi Kappa Phi.

### **Melina Duggal**

*Orlando, Florida*

Duggal has worked on a wide range of market and financial analysis, economic development, regional growth patterns, and consumer research projects concerning real estate and urban development issues throughout the United States. She has worked for RCLCO (Robert Charles Lesser & Co.) since 1998. Prior to joining RCLCO, she worked as a community planner for a consulting firm based in Detroit, Michigan.

Her specialties include large-scale, master-planned communities, mixed-use development, metropolitan development trends, and regional growth patterns. The majority of her work has been in the Midwest, mid-Atlantic, and southeastern portions of the United States.

Duggal received her master of urban planning from the University of Michigan. She is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and the American Planning Association (APA). She has spoken for organizations such as the Urban Land Institute, Commercial Real Estate for Women, and the APA. Duggal has also written multiple articles published in *Urban Land* and recently wrote a case study to be included in the new *ULI Resort Development Handbook*. She participated in a ULI Advisory Services panel for the reuse of the Homestead Air Force Base.



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1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.  
Suite 500 West  
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201



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