

2026

COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN



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INTRODUCTION

TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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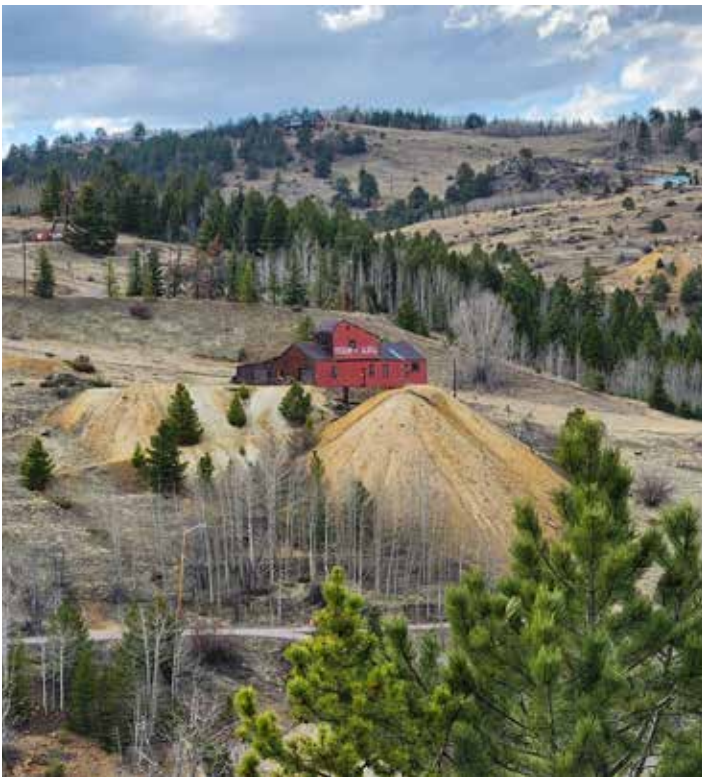
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan sets forth a bold but grounded vision for the future of Central City—one centered on livability and quality of life for all who call the community home. As the city continues to evolve, this plan reaffirms that comprehensive planning must lead the land development code, establishing a clear policy foundation before regulatory tools are applied. The purpose of the plan is to articulate the community’s long-term aspirations, direct investment, guide private development, and ensure that future growth strengthens the city’s historic, cultural, and economic assets.

A modern comprehensive development plan is one of the most essential documents a municipality can create. It integrates economics, land use, mobility, infrastructure, housing, environment, and historic preservation into a cohesive strategy. In doing so, it provides a shared roadmap for decision-makers, residents, and investors.

The updated plan also repositions the land development code as a tool for quality development—rather than an instrument of restriction—clarifying that regulation should enable desirable outcomes, support adaptive reuse, and promote sustainable growth. This shift is central to fostering a resilient and prosperous future for Central City.



Coeur D’Alene Mine photo by Blake Lasley

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GOALS & OBJECTIVES FOR THE 2026 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

The 2026 update responds directly to demographic shifts, economic changes, and the city’s urgent need to rebuild its residential base, strengthen its cultural identity, and attract reinvestment. Key objectives of this edition include:

Fostering Prosperity and Preservation

Support meaningful, responsible growth—particularly new large-scale development—while reinforcing Central City’s national reputation as a historic community. Economic vitality and preservation are positioned as mutually reinforcing goals.

Implementing Transformational Policy and Regulatory Reform

Introduce major updates to the Comprehensive Plan and subsequent regulatory framework to attract new residents, businesses, and visitors. These changes are designed to reduce barriers to investment, improve clarity, and facilitate the flow of capital and services into the city.

Elevating Administrative Accountability and Developer Partnership

Create an organizational culture grounded in transparency, responsiveness, and collaboration. The city seeks to welcome serious proposals with an environment of mutual respect, predictable processes, and high professional standards.

Reversing Decades of Urban Decline

Address long-standing trends including population loss, declining tourism and visitation numbers, contraction of the tax base, and erosion of property values. This plan focuses on measurable strategies that restore Central City as a thriving and economically resilient mountain community.

KEY CONCEPTS GUIDING THE 2026 PLAN

To implement these goals, the Comprehensive Plan introduces several foundational planning concepts that reframe how the city understands land use, development, and urban form.



Diagram of Village Connectivity

1. THE CONCEPT OF VILLAGES

Central City’s topography, history, and patterns of growth have naturally organized the community into distinct “Villages.” This planning framework:

- A. Recognizes that historic settlement patterns, steep terrain, and varying infrastructure capacity have shaped distinct areas with unique identities.
- B. Embraces the divergent character of each Village, enabling tailored policy, design, and investment strategies.
- C. Improves circulation within each Village, ensuring that residents, visitors, and goods can move efficiently and comfortably.
- D. Guides density regulation in a manner that reflects real conditions, respects hillside development patterns, and allows appropriate intensification in targeted areas.

2. AREAS OF STABILITY VS. AREAS OF GROWTH

- A. The plan distinguishes between places intended to remain stable—preserving their existing character—and strategic growth areas where new development, increased building height, greater density, and mixed uses are encouraged.
- B. This approach ensures that change is purposeful, predictable, and aligned with long-term community goals.

3. URBAN CONNECTIVITY IMPROVEMENTS

A more connected city is a more livable city. The plan prioritizes:

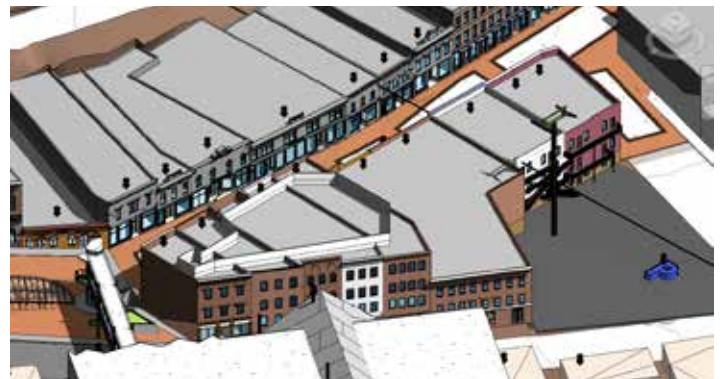
- A. A cohesive and well-maintained road network,
- B. Expanded sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure,
- C. A linked system of trails and recreational corridors, and
- D. Public transit improvements, including better integration with regional bus service and potential future connections to Denver.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF PATTERN INSTEAD OF SEGREGATION

- A. Rather than reinforcing rigid land-use silos, the plan re-examines zoning through a pattern-based lens—one shaped by natural features, built form, view corridors, and the organic pathways created by people and goods.
- B. This approach exposes outdated assumptions within the existing land development code and aligns regulation with real urban function.

5. A 3-DIMENSIONAL DIGITAL TWIN

To support modern, transparent urban governance, the city will begin implementing a 3-D Digital Twin of Central City—an interactive model that enhances planning review, infrastructure management, disaster preparedness, and public communication.



Central City Digital Twin 3D View



Post Card of Gardens Between Teller House and Central City Opera circa 1953 (Library of Congress)

COMMUNITY VISION

Reasons to Reside, Invest, Visit, and Return

Throughout the public engagement process, community members have acknowledged the need to change for the city to survive. Appropriate change, however, looks different to each person. Some residents long for the nostalgia of years gone by, some wish to restore the glory of the Gold Rush era, some wish for the modern amenities and services necessary to form a self-sustaining community. Nearly everyone desires a healthy economy. Previous plans and current regulations are very protective of the historic assets that make up the National Historic Landmark District but are so restrictive, they inhibit growth. Generations have gone by without meaningful growth in the city and as a result, there is economic strain and stagnation stifling opportunities for residents.

This update to the Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the economic realities facing the community and it provides a path forward for the historic town that will restore prosperity to residents and local businesses. The goals and strategies provide the framework and steps to a bright future where Central City can regain vitality and celebrate its identity and sense of place.

CONCLUSION

This Executive Summary introduces a comprehensive plan that aims to restore Central City's prosperity, reinforce its identity, and guide growth with clarity and vision. By aligning policy, regulation, infrastructure, and preservation, the 2026 Comprehensive Plan charts a path toward a more livable, equitable, and resilient future—one in which residents, businesses, and visitors can fully participate in the renewal of one of Colorado's most storied mountain communities.

CHANGES INTRODUCED IN THE 2026 EDITION

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan marks an evolution in Central City's planning philosophy. The most important changes include:

1. Strategic Relaxation of Density and Height Restrictions

In select areas, the plan recommends increased allowable height and density to catalyze investment, support economically viable mixed-use development, and create new opportunities for housing, hospitality, entertainment, and commercial uses. These changes are intended to unlock constrained parcels and encourage thoughtfully scaled development that suits Central City's terrain and skyline.

2. Reimagining Architectural Character

This edition repositions the city away from mandated pseudo-historicism and toward authentic, context-sensitive architectural creativity. New construction should complement the historic streetscape through scale, massing, and pedestrian orientation—not through imitation of historic styles. This approach restores alignment with national preservation standards, encourages innovative design, and creates a visually richer, more forward-looking urban fabric.

CENTRAL CITY ORIGINS

by David Forsyth, Gilpin Historical Society

Central City is a hidden gem set high in the mountains above the thriving Front Range hustle and bustle. A trip to Central City allows the visitor to step back in time to the days when miners walked the streets or hunted for the gold veins running through the hillsides. Through diligent historic preservation efforts, Central City today looks very much like it did in the 1870s.

In 1859, John Gregory discovered the Gregory lode in a gulch just east of present-day Central City. Within two weeks, the gold rush was on and within two months the population grew to over 15,000 people, all of them seeking their fortunes. One story suggests that Central City received its name after Rocky Mountain News editor William Newton Byers camped in between Mountain City and Nevada City and suggested a town be laid out there, while another story suggests it was named after the Central City Store that was located at the present-day corner of Eureka and Main Streets.

Central City soon became known as the “Richest Square Mile on Earth.” Between 1859 and 1942, Central City’s mines produced 4.2 million ounces of gold. Early placer mining operations quickly gave way to hard rock mines. Cornish miners, nicknamed Cousin Jacks, were known for their hard rock mining skills and they became prized workers in Central City mines. They also built many of the rock walls that visitors see around the town today.

While Central City’s mines produced mainly gold, they also produced silver, lead, and uranium. Marie Curie used pitchblende, mined to the south of Central City, for her radioactivity research in Paris. In the 1940s, at the start of the Cold War, there was a minor boom as prospectors hunted for uranium in the hills around Central City.



Gregory Gulch circa 1865 colored historic photograph



Stagecoach in Central City

Along with the miners came merchants, bankers, lawyers, and other professions vital to operating the mines. Central City became a political and economic powerhouse in Colorado, and when the territory became a state in 1876, its first two United States senators, Henry Teller and Jerome Chaffee, and representative, James Belford, had deep ties to Central City.

Not everyone in Colorado struck it rich, but those who settled in Central City were never hard up for wild times. According to legend, in 1861, Central City recorded 217 fist fights, 97 revolver fights, 11 bowie knife fights, and one dog fight. Amazingly, no one was killed. Despite the rowdiness, Central City’s residents wanted law and order. When they first arrived, the miners established miners’ courts to govern each mining district, and as cities became formalized, they included police forces, courts, and jails. The first legal execution in the Colorado Territory took place in Central City in 1863 when William Van Horn was hanged for murder.

Miners further helped establish a stable society in Central City by bringing their families to the camp, and establishing churches, schools, benevolent and fraternal organizations, a library, and a vibrant theater scene. Central City’s early residents also enjoyed the services of several doctors.



Historic Drawing of Gregory Gulch diggings

In order to show the permanence of Central City, in 1872 several business leaders banded together and built the Teller House hotel. Advertisements boldly proclaimed it the finest hotel west of the Mississippi River, and it hosted President Ulysses S. Grant when he had dinner while visiting Central City in 1873. City leaders laid 26 ingots of solid silver on the sidewalk at the entrance to the Teller House in order to impress Grant, and after they convinced him that the silver was indeed real, he happily walked on it to enter the building. Just two years later, in 1875, former Confederate president Jefferson Davis also visited Central City. Other political leaders who visited included future president William Howard Taft, who was on the United States Court of Appeals when he came in 1894, and Republican presidential candidate Wendell Willkie, who made a campaign stop in 1940.

Among Central City's many famous residents were hat manufacturer John B. Stetson, railroad car builder George Pullman, shoemaker William L. Douglas, Colorado historian Caroline Bancroft and the legendary Baby Doe Tabor. Medical pioneer Florence Sabin was born in Central City, as was actor Schuyler Ladd. Central City has long been a popular location for Hollywood, and among the movies filmed here are three starring Tom Mix in 1910 and 1911, *The Duchess* and *the Dirtwater Fox* in 1976, portions of the tv miniseries *Centennial* and *Dream West*, and several *Perry Mason* episodes in the 1980s.

By the early 1900s, mining had largely died out in Central City and the town struggled for many years to survive. Two events in the late 1920s and early 1930s helped usher in Central City's rebirth as a tourist destination. Dr. William Mark Muchow, a Chicago dentist, opened the Glory Hole Mine in 1928. Four years later, in 1932, the Central City Opera House reopened with its first summer festival. The new mining operation and the opera revived interest in Central City, and they were soon joined by restaurants, bars, antique and souvenir shops, museums, parades, and other festivities. In the late 1940s, Denver's infamous mob family, the Smaldones operated their Monte Carlo casino on Main Street after they allegedly convinced Central City's leaders to ignore their illegal activities by funding a hot lunch program at the school, restoration of some houses, and improvements to the city's sewer system.

Hoping to make Central City more of a year-round destination, in the late 1980s city leaders pushed to legalize gambling in Central City. Colorado voters approved the constitutional amendment allowing it in 1990, and the first casinos opened in 1991. Money from gaming has not only helped preserve Central City's historic buildings, greatly improve the infrastructure and city services, but has also funded more than \$1 billion in preservation projects throughout Colorado.



Central City Opera House 2023



CENTRAL CITY TODAY

Central City stands at 8,510 feet in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains and thrives as a small, historic community with big cultural energy. Residents protect its compact downtown, scenic views, and historic charm while welcoming new investment that supports long-term vitality.

About 770 people lived in Central City in 2023, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Neighbors take pride in their city’s character and volunteer to preserve landmarks, organize festivals, and improve public spaces. City leaders focus on balancing preservation with growth, keeping Central City authentic while supporting its role as a regional destination.

Heritage defines the community’s identity. The Central City–Black Hawk National Historic Landmark District anchors local tourism and protects treasured sites such as the Teller House, Gilpin History Museum, and the Central City Opera House. Each summer, the Central City Opera Festival attracts thousands of visitors and strengthens the city’s arts economy.

Tourism, gaming, and small business activity drive Central City’s economy. The Colorado Division of Gaming reported more than \$200 million in statewide gaming revenue in 2024, while the Colorado Tourism Office recorded \$28.5 billion in travel spending statewide. However, Central City has produced a steadily declining percentage of gaming revenues since its peak in 1992 and it has not been able to improve despite a growing market. The increasing cost of providing essential services places a burden on Central City that revenues cannot carry.

With a strong sense of history, Central City celebrates the past. By embracing and a forward-looking vision, Central City may restore prosperity by investing in its future.



City Hall 2025. Photo by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture.

CHAPTER 1 PLAN SUMMARY

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15	1.2 PROCEDURE FOR CREATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
17	1.3 STATUTORY REVIEW
17	1.4 PRIMARY OBJECTIVES



1.1 PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that provides a vision for the future and sets out broad objectives, specific goals, policies, and land use planning outcomes that specify how to achieve this vision. This plan was first prepared in 2017 with revisions in 2020 and 2023.

This Comprehensive Plan is the community's document, and it should be used to protect the community identity and provide a clear direction for a prosperous future. It allows for the growth needed to attract new residents and visitors to Central City and articulates strategies that will make it an even better place to live, work and visit. The Comprehensive Plan will also serve as a guide to property owners and developers to help them understand the vision of the community, set general guidance for desired development outcomes and to make informed land use proposals.

1.2 PROCEDURE FOR CREATING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The 2026 Comprehensive Plan Update builds upon previous versions, incorporating elements of the latest statutory requirements, updating data analyses to include the latest available information, and updates the recommendations for economic vitality and future land use. The content and recommendations were developed through a collaborative process with input from research, public engagement, local businesses, and working with representatives from the following organizations:

- **The City of Central**
- **Central City Urban Renewal Authority**
- **Central City Downtown Development Authority**
- **Central City Business Improvement District**
- **Central City Opera Foundation**
- **Colorado Division of Local Affairs Main Street Program**
- **Gilpin Historic Society**
- **History Colorado**
- **History Matters**

Drafts of the comprehensive plan content were presented during multiple public meetings and community members were invited to give feedback in person and online via CentralCity.app, which was created for feedback and surveys. Links to the app were posted at City Hall and advertised at booths during local events.

Prior to adoption, the Comprehensive Plan will be presented to the Planning Commission for review and recommendation, and then to City Council.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SCHEDULE

- **Public Work Session 1**
CentralCity.app Goes Live (7.29.2025)
- **Public Session 2** (8.4.2025)
- **Public Session 3** (8.18.2025)

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS ARE
AVAILABLE AT **CENTRALCITY.APP**



DESIGN TEAM



OBERMEIER-SHEYKHET
ARCHITECTURE

**ARCHITECTURE
PLANNING
HISTORIC PRESERVATION**



LANDSCAPE & PLANNING



PLUMMER

CIVIL ENGINEERING



TRANSPORTATION
CONSULTANTS, INC.

**TRAFFIC
ENGINEERING**



BDITS, LLC

Analytics & Technology

**ANALYTICS &
TECHNOLOGY**

1.3 STATUTORY REVIEW



A Comprehensive Plan, or Master Plan, was created and adopted by the City of Central, which is consistent with Colorado Revised Statutes, Section 31-23-206. This plan is not regulatory and does not change existing regulations, nor does it create new regulations. It is an advisory strategic planning document that recommends and provides general guidance to decision makers for recommendation(s) or decision(s) they are called upon to make. It covers the following broad objectives:

1. **Encourage Growth and Diversification**
2. **Achieve Economic Independence and Vitality**
3. **Protect Genuine Historic Character and Assets**
4. **Improve Quality of Life**
5. **Rehabilitate and Modernize Infrastructure**
6. **Foster Effective Communications**

These objectives chart direction for changes to regulations required to achieve them. The Comprehensive Plan is written to provide general policy direction while also providing enough detail to set priorities and guide decision-making.

[Requirements for the Comprehensive Plan](#) are determined by the [Colorado Department of Local Affairs \(DOLA\) Division of Local Government](#):

REQUIRED ELEMENTS

Elements that are required in Colorado's comprehensive plan statute (C.R.S. 30-28-106 and 31-23-206) include:

- **A narrative description** of the procedure used for the development and adoption of the comprehensive plan, including a summary of any objections to the comprehensive plan made by neighboring jurisdictions (defined in C.R.S. 24-32-3209(1)(h), and includes special district water providers per 30-28-106(3)(a.3)(I) and 31-23-206(1.3)(b))
- **Housing Action Plan** (most recent housing action plan adopted pursuant to C.R.S. 24-32-3705)
- **Recreation and Tourism**
- **[Strategic Growth](#)**

- [Population and growth rate-related exemptions](#) apply per C.R.S. 30-28-106(3)(a.7)(II) and 31-23-206(1.7)(b))
- Schedule & Frequency: Completed by December 31, 2026. Updated no less frequently than every five years
- **[Three-Mile Plan](#)** (required of Regional Planning Commissions and municipalities)
- **[Water Supply](#)** (additional guidance)
 - Completed by December 31, 2026
 - Updated no less frequently than every five years”

As this plan is developed in 2024- , some of the requirements and support needed to fulfill them are not yet in place or Central City is exempt due to current population size. However, the requirements shall be met individually and incorporated into future versions of the Comprehensive Plan as needed.

1.4 PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

The six primary objectives for the comprehensive plan frame the strategic direction that the community provided in the public involvement process. These objectives and subsequent goals are integrated throughout the plan and are of equal importance when weighed against each other, while also providing the primary context and cause of subsequent specified goals described.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 1 – ENCOURAGE GROWTH & DIVERSIFICATION

Encourage growth over multiple economic sectors to generate revenue and improve the health of the residents, businesses, and provide means to protect and enhance the historic assets within the city and attract large scale development.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 2 – ACHIEVE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND VITALITY

Capitalize on community strengths and assets to deliberately grow and diversify the economy for self-sufficiency by establishing Central City as a full-service municipality.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 3 – PROTECT GENUINE HISTORIC CHARACTER AND ASSETS

Rehabilitate and enhance the genuine historic assets of the city and the National Historic Landmark District - its precious and treasured asset - and embrace growth to provide the means for effective historic preservation.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 4 – IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

Improve health, safety, services, amenities, public space, open space, and the local economy to position Central City as a great place to both live and work.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 5 – REHABILITATE & MODERNIZE INFRASTRUCTURE

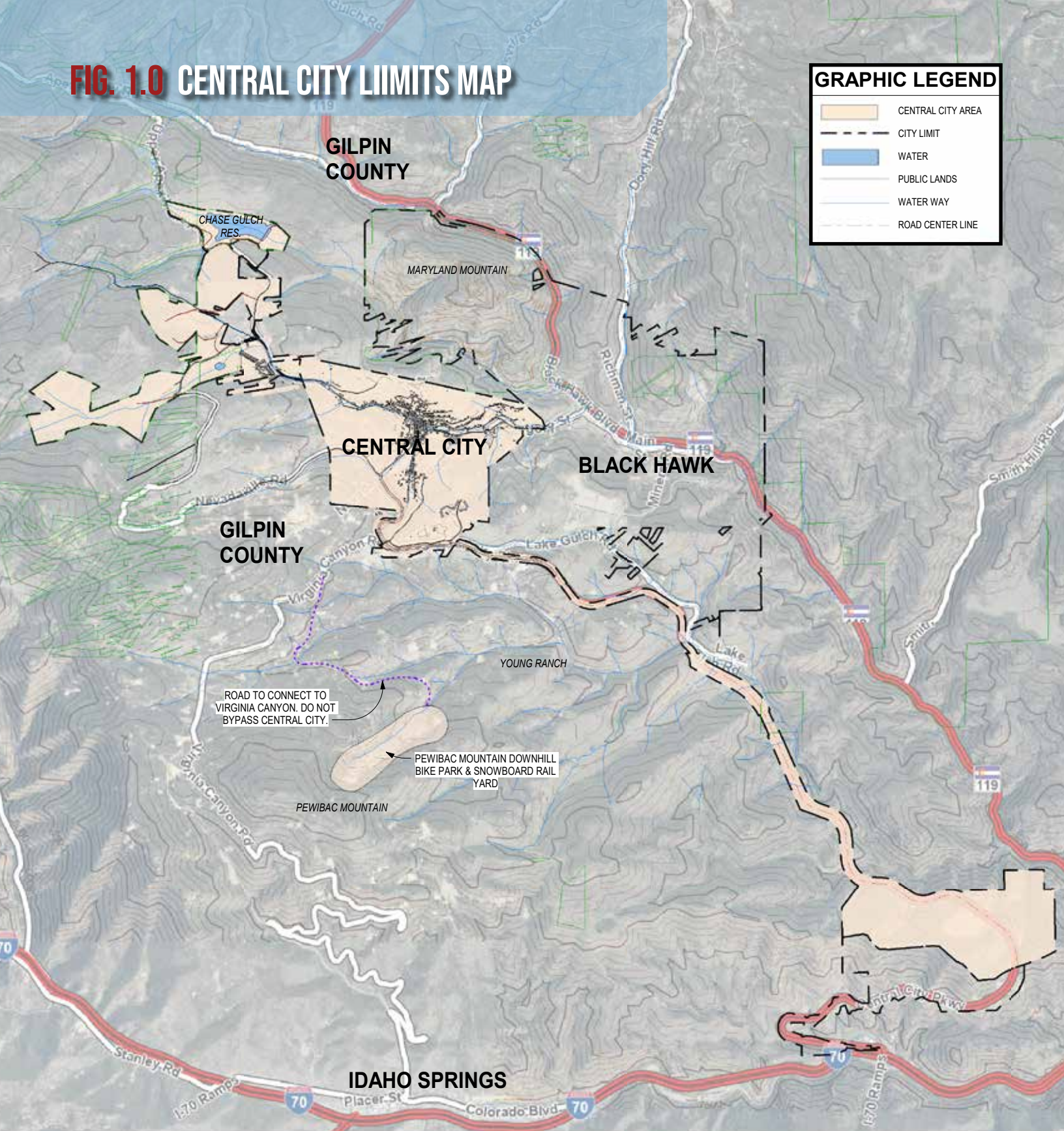
Generate capital to invest in required infrastructure to support current and future residents and provide sustained public services that will support the other primary goals and promote general health and welfare.

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE 6 – FOSTER EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Ensure a clear, concise, and predictable development process that promotes a fair, transparent, and timely review.

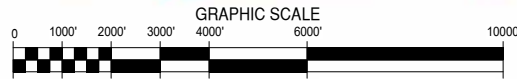


FIG. 1.0 CENTRAL CITY LIMITS MAP



GRAPHIC LEGEND

- CENTRAL CITY AREA
- CITY LIMIT
- WATER
- PUBLIC LANDS
- WATER WAY
- ROAD CENTER LINE



CHAPTER 2

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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2.1 INTRODUCTION SUMMARY

Central City is well-positioned to grow and diversify and will take an active approach to facilitate the desired change. This Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the need of an economic engine to attract and sustain the desired diverse economy. It also identifies the community's economic strengths, its most valuable physical assets, opportunities for growth and diversification, and provides steps for a sustainable and prosperous local economy.

ECONOMIC ENGINES: GAMING & NON-GAMING

Previous efforts to improve the local economy have focused on prioritizing small infill projects to attract future larger-scale growth and have proven ineffective. The result has been analogous to a strip-mall without an anchor store – smaller stores do not thrive without regular traffic generated by a larger draw. This plan revises the priorities to encourage large scale development (economic engines) that can provide the residents and visitors to support the smaller businesses in the community and the revenue to improve the infrastructure and services required.

ECONOMIC ENGINES WITHIN THE HISTORIC GAMING AND GREGORY GULCH GAMING DISTRICTS

Dependence on gaming alone leads to vulnerability as a single industry's fluctuation can significantly affect the entire economy. However, supporting gaming development within the Historic Gaming and Gregory Gulch Gaming Districts remains the highest and best land use and is the most direct and immediate means of generating significant revenue needed to support the primary objectives.

ECONOMIC ENGINES OUTSIDE OF THE GAMING DISTRICTS

Large-scale gaming development is not the only likely economic engine available to the community. There is currently a significant housing shortage available for the workforce and areas appropriate to accommodate them within city limits and identified growth areas. With a very high demand and smaller components (like single-family residential products) a large housing development could provide jobs, residents, and revenue to support the primary objectives. See the Housing Action Plan (Chapter 4) for additional workforce housing information & goals.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS



REGENERATIVE GROWTH

- ED1. Maintain and improve infrastructure and core public services
- ED2. Capitalize on infill opportunities
- ED3. Pursue broad economic opportunities along the Central City Parkway and other growth areas
- ED4. Develop residential, commercial, and professional services
- ED5. Occupy historic buildings
- ED6. Rehabilitate the heritage assets to attract visitors and enrich the visitor experience
- ED7. Diversify housing options
- ED8. Strengthen Main Street and the Black Hawk-Central City corridor as one connected environment



UTILIZE REGIONAL STRENGTHS LOCALLY

- ED9. Develop outdoor recreation niches in Central City that synergize with the Colorado tourism market
- ED10. Expand creative industries



INCREASE NEW AND RETURNING VISITORS

- ED11. Capture a wider range of Colorado Tourists and prioritize repeat visitation
- ED12. Support and further develop special events and year-round activities
- ED13. Expand commercial visitor services
- ED14. Eliminate vacant storefronts within the historic core
- ED15. Establish marketing to attract residents and businesses

2.2 TRENDS AND CONTEXT



A group gathers for dinner in the Dostal Alley parking lot

A. TRENDS NARRATIVE



This section highlights how Central City's economy has shifted since the COVID-19 shock (using 2019 as a pre-pandemic baseline) and what those shifts mean for the city, Gilpin County and Colorado overall. The analysis compares conditions within Central City to those of the county and state.

TOURISM DEMAND REBOUNDED AND SET NEW RECORDS

Colorado visitor volume and spending surpassed pre-pandemic levels by 2023. The Colorado Tourism Office reports 93.3 million visitors in 2023 (up from 90 million in 2022) and \$28.2 billion in traveler spending (up from \$27.2 billion in 2022), marking new highs for the state's tourism economy. ^[2.1]



WHAT IT MEANS LOCALLY

Central City's visitor economy is tied to day trips and gaming-driven overnights from the Front Range. Statewide gains signal a larger demand pool for cultural attractions, events and lodging in the historic core, but competition for those dollars is rising as metro destinations also post records. City programming and wayfinding that convert day-trippers into longer stays can capture more of this growth. At the county level, stronger statewide visitation supports Gilpin's tourism workforce and tax base. For the state, record tourism has broadened sales, lodging and gaming tax collections that fund local services. ^[2.2]

FIG. 2.1

COLORADO AGP & TAX REVENUE (BY FISCAL YEAR)

[2.3]

	STATEWIDE		BLACK HAWK		CENTRAL CITY		CRIPPLE CREEK	
	Taxes	AGP	Taxes	AGP	Taxes	AGP	Taxes	AGP
FY1992	10,790,342	96,318,656	3,350,708	27,874,886	4,852,264	41,701,907	2,587,370	26,741,863
FY1993	30,114,028	226,613,025	12,156,569	84,635,235	11,080,959	79,367,684	6,876,500	62,610,106
FY1994	39,833,816	289,922,437	20,906,676	143,079,615	10,163,717	72,371,319	8,763,423	74,471,503
FY1995	43,984,231	358,861,347	26,093,879	185,499,147	9,802,744	84,493,099	8,087,608	88,869,101
FY1996	50,840,544	401,698,225	30,130,112	210,760,331	11,419,901	92,209,427	9,290,531	98,728,467
FY1997	53,934,420	423,431,814	33,410,108	228,259,842	10,758,198	87,723,118	9,766,114	107,448,854
FY1998	61,714,541	448,569,312	37,917,661	246,066,413	12,572,944	92,696,891	11,223,935	109,806,007
FY1999	74,229,691	514,066,108	51,179,103	315,758,347	11,120,419	81,835,067	11,930,169	116,472,694
FY2000	76,474,602	595,347,429	57,771,058	394,824,421	9,261,602	69,806,829	9,441,941	130,716,179
FY2001	88,722,061	650,540,542	69,785,046	453,651,779	8,605,615	60,448,122	10,331,401	136,440,640
FY2002	95,672,703	707,804,270	76,708,501	510,883,483	8,003,524	56,178,520	10,960,678	140,742,267
FY2003	97,450,869	707,229,904	79,921,914	513,013,936	6,298,293	51,523,668	11,230,662	142,692,301
FY2004	98,103,310	711,641,117	80,132,456	516,933,727	6,722,846	49,651,748	11,248,007	145,055,643
FY2005	99,078,163	743,835,872	79,321,431	527,678,568	8,518,313	65,630,795	11,238,419	150,526,509
FY2006	106,131,460	765,426,159	85,717,855	543,497,102	8,735,315	68,991,032	11,678,290	152,938,026
FY2007	112,030,956	798,969,770	90,196,259	565,648,333	10,133,059	80,234,409	11,701,638	153,087,029
FY2008	108,176,398	773,392,238	87,649,976	551,330,727	9,393,200	74,808,212	11,133,223	147,253,298
FY2009	94,906,277	701,770,974	77,363,186	498,387,219	7,315,677	63,671,341	10,227,414	139,712,414
FY2010	107,667,716	764,976,870	90,168,223	561,335,383	7,448,458	64,734,231	10,051,035	138,907,255
FY2011	104,794,878	754,115,371	89,342,036	554,321,728	5,229,473	67,084,076	10,223,369	132,709,567
FY2012	102,115,638	759,637,443	85,653,341	556,162,224	7,116,418	72,113,158	9,345,879	131,362,060
FY2013	104,133,551	761,421,032	86,756,557	556,684,770	7,370,346	71,788,251	10,006,647	132,948,010
FY2014	104,877,636	740,646,937	89,235,687	551,611,629	6,358,865	64,808,263	9,283,084	124,227,045
FY2015	110,083,089	766,200,633	94,053,087	578,383,636	6,190,283	63,482,707	9,839,719	124,334,291
FY2016	116,287,104	802,705,186	98,954,269	604,700,394	6,974,896	67,934,277	10,357,940	130,070,515
FY2017	117,400,965	813,410,392	100,145,911	609,401,630	5,905,621	70,627,360	11,349,433	133,381,402
FY2018	125,272,331	838,608,664	105,339,974	626,909,294	8,186,354	75,312,380	11,746,003	136,386,990
FY2019	125,000,125	840,319,425	103,667,491	619,307,585	8,936,207	79,838,347	12,396,426	141,173,493
FY2020	80,333,984	617,696,093	69,231,704	450,906,340	3,753,477	58,874,020	7,348,804	107,915,734
FY2021	120,480,062	818,232,834	98,885,003	594,768,803	8,530,124	76,991,736	13,064,935	146,472,295
FY2022	162,003,740	1,028,518,510	134,974,250	779,594,605	9,537,596	82,501,191	17,491,894	166,422,714
FY2023	172,923,715	1,089,645,343	146,908,763	839,554,982	9,357,259	83,885,417	16,657,693	166,204,944
FY2024	175,368,307	1,101,611,668	148,849,520	849,783,563	8,987,892	79,960,789	17,530,895	171,867,316
FY2025	177,598,160	1,113,470,303	148,973,219	849,876,052	8,269,886	76,468,666	20,355,055	187,125,585
TOTAL	3,348,529,413	23,526,655,906	2,690,851,531	16,701,085,731	282,911,748	2,429,748,059	374,766,135	4,395,822,116

GAMING RECOVERED; RULE CHANGES LIFTED REVENUE POTENTIAL

After mandatory closures in 2020, Colorado’s casino industry recovered. The state Division of Gaming reports gaming and sports-betting tax revenues of about \$204 million in FY 2023-24, up from roughly \$193 million in FY 2022-23. The agency attributes part of the post-COVID lift to Amendment 77, which removed single-bet limits and allowed additional games with local approval (effective 2021-22). Distributions send 12% of “extended” gaming revenue to Gilpin and Teller counties and 10% to Central City, Black Hawk and Cripple Creek. [2.3]

WHAT IT MEANS LOCALLY

Gaming remains Central City’s fiscal cornerstone and a major share of Gilpin County revenue. [The county’s 2024 budget](#) notes roughly 47% of revenues are from gaming distributions, underscoring sensitivity to industry cycles. For the city, steady AGP growth and the no-limit environment widen the runway for reinvestment in streets, community services, and visitor amenities, but exposure to market shifts—competition with Black Hawk, consumer spending changes—remains high. Statewide, rising gaming receipts bolster historic preservation, community colleges and the general fund per statute. [2.2] [2.3]

Even with a growing gaming industry in the state, Central City’s revenues remain stagnant or in decline. In 2025, Central City gaming tax revenue was \$8.26M. (4.6% of the total state revenue.) This is similar to each year (2020 excepted) back to 2018 and substantially less than the 1998 high mark of \$12.57M (20.4% of state tax revenue). [2.3]



Artist concept of local outdoor recreation trail improvements. Obermeier Sheykhhet Architecture



EMPLOYMENT CLIMBED BACK ABOVE PANDEMIC LOWS

Gilpin County employment estimates reached a new peak of about 3,852 jobs in 2023, up from 3,508 in 2020 and back on the pre-COVID trend by 2022, reflecting rehiring in gaming, hospitality and services.^[2.4]



WHAT IT MEANS LOCALLY

For Central City businesses, deeper labor pools can improve service levels and hours of operation, but commuting and housing constraints still limit staffing. Countywide, tighter labor can pressure wages and complicate recruitment for public safety and seasonal roles. At the state level, Colorado's broad labor recovery underpins tourism and entertainment spending that feeds Central City's economy.^[2.4]



OUTDOOR RECREATION SURGED AS A COMPLEMENTARY DRAW

Colorado's outdoor recreation economy reached an estimated \$17.2 billion in 2023 and 132,500 jobs, growing its share of state GDP. As a Peak-to-Peak Scenic Byway gateway, Central City can leverage trail access and scenic byways to pair gaming and heritage with outdoor itineraries. For Gilpin County, recreation adds four-season opportunities to visit beyond the casino floor; for the state, it diversifies the visitor mix and spreads spending to rural areas.^[2.5]



OVERNIGHT MIX IS SHIFTING TOWARD SHORT-TERM RENTALS

Visitor research shows continued growth in travelers using short-term rental (STR) platforms in 2023 versus 2022, alongside higher statewide lodging spending. This affects where visitors sleep and shop. Central City's limited room inventory means many visitors bed down in nearby communities; STR growth can capture more overnights if aligned with neighborhood compatibility. Countywide, STRs broaden the lodging base and tax receipts; statewide, they are an increasing slice of tourism spend.^[2.1]

SALES TAX AND CITY REVENUES ARE STABILIZING WITH TOURISM

As tourism and gaming normalized post-2020, Central City’s financial planning reflects stronger gaming distributions and conservative sales-tax budgeting for 2026, signaling stabilization with caution about macro risks. That pattern mirrors county and state revenue outlooks tied to consumer spending and gaming performance. ^[2,3]

B. ECONOMIC TRENDS



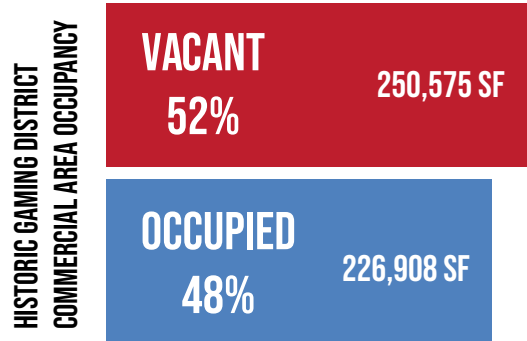
TREND 1 – GAMING CONTINUES TO DOMINATE REVENUE

- 2023 Gaming was 95% of local revenue. All other revenue is only 5%.



TREND 2 – REAL PROPERTY VACANCIES, SHUTTERED BUSINESSES

- 52% of available commercial areas are vacant
- Additional +/- 20% are underutilized with vacant levels

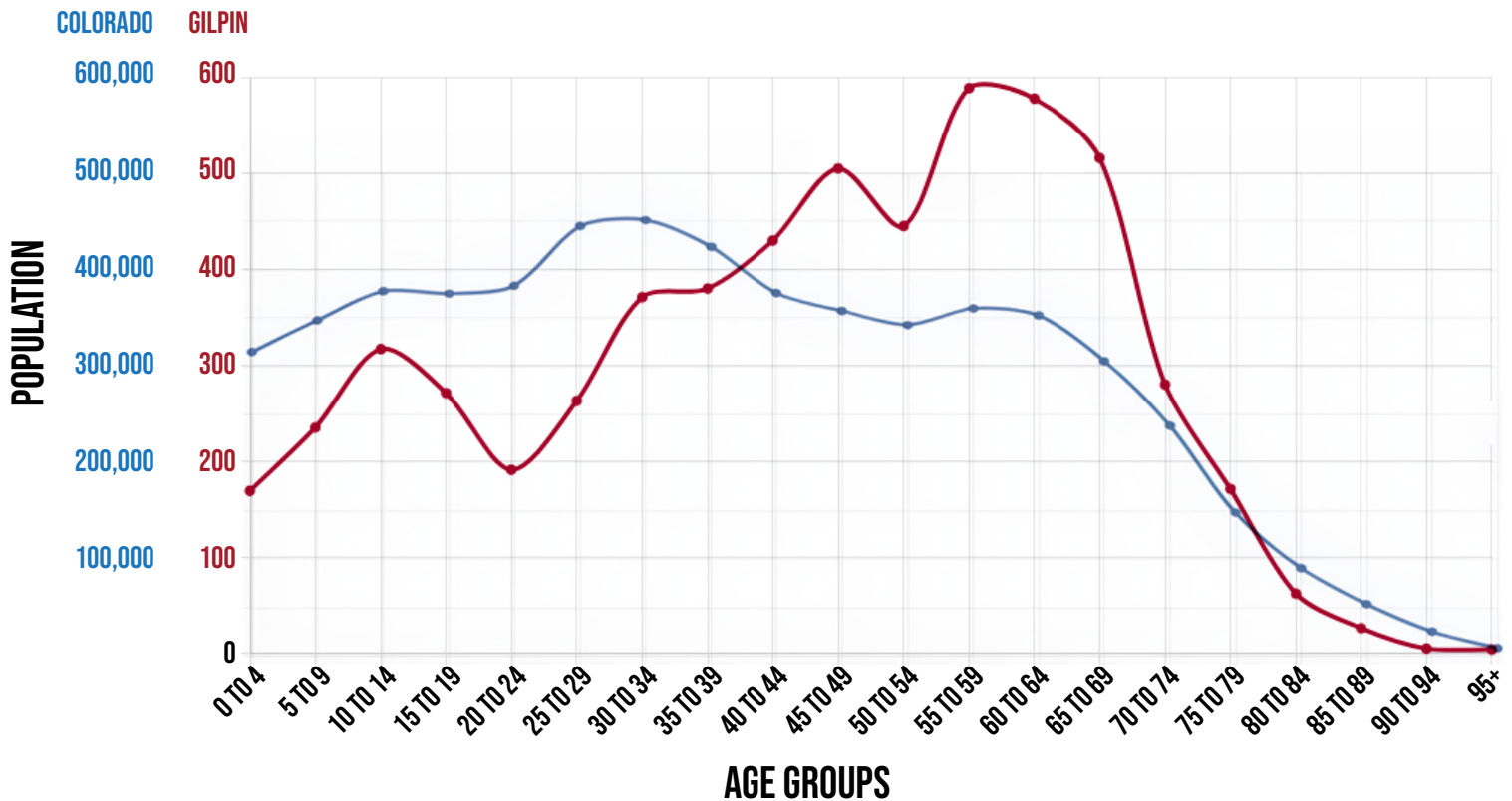


2025 Vacancies

TREND 3 – AGING LOCAL POPULATION

- Largest Population Age Group is 60-70 (see Fig. 2.2)
- Largest decrease in age 0-4 population
- 40% increase in 65+ population

FIG. 2.2 GILPIN COUNTY VS. COLORADO AGE COMPARISON ^[2,3]





Artist concept of large scale development envelopes in Central City by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

TREND 4 – CENTRAL CITY GAMING STAGNANT DURING GROWTH PERIOD

- Colorado Adjusted Gross Proceeds (AGP) was nearly identical in 1993 and 2024, where inflation & rising costs have continued to climb.
- The AGP value is 52% of what it was in 1993. (See figure 2.3)
- The same AGP generated +/- \$1.1M less tax revenue
- The 2025 equivalent of the \$11M 1993 tax revenue is \$24.7M meaning that the value of the tax revenue generated from the approximately the same AGP dollar amount is only 36% of what it was in 1993.

CENTRAL CITY TAX REVENUE & AGP ^[2.3]

YEAR	TAX REV.	AGP
FY1993	11,080,959	79,367,684
FY2021	8,530,124	76,991,736
FY2022	9,537,596	82,501,191
FY2023	9,357,259	83,885,417
FY2024	8,987,892	79,960,789
FY2025	8,269,886	76,468,666



2.3 TOURISM & RECREATION



Main Street 2024. Photo by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

A. GAMING TOURISM



GAMING TOURISM SUMMARY

Gaming tourism is the economic powerhouse of Central City. It has shaped the city's fiscal landscape, regional identity, and visitor economy for more than three decades. As one of only three Colorado communities legally authorized to offer commercial casino gaming under the [Colorado Limited Gaming Act \(C.R.S. 44-30\)](#), Central City occupies a uniquely advantageous position.

This exclusivity—shared only with Black Hawk and Cripple Creek—creates a stable foundation that few mountain communities enjoy. However, APA best practices emphasize that communities dependent on a single economic sector must plan with resilience, diversification, and future adaptability in mind.^[2,6]

Statewide, gaming tourism is strong, growing, and evolving. The challenge for Central City is not simply to keep pace with it, but to leverage it, expand it, reinforce it, and connect it to broader economic ecosystems, urban design goals, housing initiatives, and historic preservation.

CURRENT CONDITIONS: A HIGH-PERFORMING BUT VULNERABLE ECONOMIC ENGINE

Central City hosts six casinos, two with hotels, integrating lodging, entertainment, and gaming into a compact mountain urban form. The Colorado Division of Gaming reports record-setting revenue in FY 2024–2025, with continued increases in Adjusted Gross Proceeds (AGP) and statewide gaming tax collections:

- [https://sbg.colorado.gov/\(Specialized Business Group – Division of Gaming\)](https://sbg.colorado.gov/(Specialized Business Group - Division of Gaming))

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

- Gaming-derived revenues (device fees + gaming taxes) account for ~55% of the City's General Fund.
- Property taxes via the 9.631-mill levy provide a stable but modest ~4% of revenues.
- Gaming proceeds in Central City reached \$80M in 2018 and statewide revenues have continued to rise annually.

APA guidance encourages cities with heavy reliance on volatile revenue sources to conduct annual fiscal risk assessments and establish diversified revenue mechanisms that buffer against gaming fluctuations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Vacant buildings in gaming districts provide rare infill and redevelopment opportunities.
- Undeveloped parcels between Black Hawk and Main Street can improve market connectivity and capture through-traffic.
- New investment interest is rising due to:
 - Record gaming revenues
 - Post-COVID tourism resurgence
 - The legalization and expansion of sports betting under [Proposition DD \(2019\)](#)

INDUSTRY EVOLUTION

Nationally, the gaming sector is diversifying into:

- Hybrid entertainment centers
- Esports and digital gaming lounges
- Experiential hospitality
- Culinary and cultural tourism integration
- Mixed-use visitor districts

Cities strengthen their position by aligning tourism districts with placemaking, housing, transportation, and downtown activation strategies.



Century Casino, 2023



GAMING TOURISM GOALS

To remain competitive among regional, national, and online gaming markets, Central City must design an economic strategy that:

- A. Strengthens its core gaming districts
- B. Expands visitor experiences beyond the gaming floor
- C. Connects markets and reduces physical barriers
- D. Supports the workforce that powers the industry
- E. Activates vacant and historic properties to increase vibrancy
- F. Aligns gaming development with long-term community goals

The [American Planning Association's \(APA\) Economic Development Toolkit](#) emphasizes that communities should encourage cluster development, destination branding, and multi-modal access—all directly relevant to improving the gaming district's regional draw.

Central City can implement these practices by linking tourism, heritage, recreation, and gaming into a cohesive mountain destination:



GOAL ED-G.1 — EMBRACE AND STRENGTHEN EXISTING AND EMERGING GAMING VENTURES

This goal reflects both APA best practices and gaming industry recommendations that communities should support their anchor economic drivers while strategically diversifying around them.



STRATEGY ED-G.A — SUPPORT WORKFORCE HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Placers, dealers, hotel staff, entertainment workers, security, and food-service workers form the backbone of the gaming economy. Without attainable local housing, turnover rises and operational capacity weakens.



Famous Bonanza Casino, Main Street 2023

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-G.A1. Expand workforce housing through infill, modular housing, and adaptive reuse (APA Housing + Economic Integration models).

ED-G.A2. Partner with gaming operators to pilot employer-assisted housing under [HB21-1271 incentives](#).

ED-G.A3. Offer density bonuses or reduced parking minimums for workforce-oriented developments.

ED-G.B3. Prioritize structured parking in redevelopment areas to support walkability and reduce congestion.

 **STRATEGY ED-G. B — INCREASE HIGHLY VISIBLE PARKING NEAR THE DOWNTOWN CORE**

Gaming visitation strongly correlates with accessibility. APA transportation research confirms that wayfinding and parking visibility significantly influence visitor choice in destination communities.

 **STRATEGY ED-G.1C — ENHANCE MULTI-MODAL CONNECTIVITY ACROSS MARKETS**

Visitor behavior research (American Gaming Association) shows that easy circulation between casinos increases dwell time and visitor spending.

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-G.B1. Implement coordinated wayfinding strategies for public parking structures.

ED-G.B2. Evaluate shared parking agreements between casinos and the city.

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-G.C1. Build a walkable spine connecting the Black Hawk corridor to Main Street.

ED-G.C2. Add pedestrian lighting, signage, and aesthetic upgrades ([APA Placemaking Standards](#)).

ED-G.C3. Expand transit partnerships and shuttle systems linking casinos, parking structures, trailheads, and heritage sites.

ED-G.C4. Improve ADA accessibility to attract more diverse visitor demographics.



STRATEGY ED1.D — ACTIVATE STOREFRONTS AND REDUCE VACANCIES

Vacancies diminish visitor experience and reduce gaming district vitality.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Implement a Vacant Storefront Activation Program modeled after [APA Main Street](#) approaches.
- Offer incentives for interim uses such as art installations, maker spaces, micro-retail, food pop-ups, and entertainment venues.
- Encourage casino operators to sponsor façade improvements or tenant recruitment campaigns.



STRATEGY ED1.E — ENCOURAGE NEW INFILL GAMING DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN BLACK HAWK AND MAIN STREET

This corridor represents the most significant economic development opportunity in Gilpin County. Infill development can physically and economically connect the region’s two largest markets.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Prioritize redevelopment of underutilized parcels with gaming, hospitality, mixed-use or entertainment projects.
- Adopt form-based or hybrid zoning to guide high-quality design compatible with historic context ([APA Zoning Practice](#)).
- Partner with Black Hawk on shared infrastructure investments for the corridor.
- Use tax-increment financing (TIF) or gaming revenue reinvestment zones where allowed.

CONCLUSION: GAMING TOURISM AS A PLATFORM FOR BROADER PROSPERITY

Central City’s gaming industry is stagnant but uniquely positioned for future growth. By embracing strategic infill development, supporting the workforce, activating storefronts, enhancing connectivity, and reinforcing its competitive advantages under Colorado gaming law, Central City can build an inclusive tourism economy that:

- Strengthens fiscal stability
- Revitalizes historic districts
- Supports housing and transportation goals
- Enhances community character
- Attracts new investment
- Connects regional tourism markets

Central City shall be at the forefront of economic planning for gaming communities—not simply maintaining its revenue base, but shaping a forward-looking, balanced, and award-winning tourism economy





B. NON-GAMING TOURISM

1. OUTDOOR RECREATION

*Artist Concept of Enhanced Trail System
by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture*



OUTDOOR RECREATION SUMMARY

Outdoor recreation drives the largest share of tourism activity in Colorado, and Central City sits in a uniquely powerful location to capture that market. Positioned just 38 miles west of Denver and centrally placed among the mountain destinations of Idaho Springs, Nederland, Black Hawk, and the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway, the city holds an advantageous geographic midpoint between the Denver metro area and the Central Rockies. This location allows Central City to serve as a gateway outdoor recreation hub—a compact, historic, and culture-rich mountain community that provides access to trails, touring routes, heritage landscapes and four-season adventure.

Outdoor recreation tourism complements the city’s gaming-based economy, supports existing small businesses, encourages new investment and strengthens year-round visitation. As seen in other small towns across Colorado and the West—such as Fruita, Salida, Grand Junction and Leadville—outdoor recreation can revitalize local economies, fill storefronts, attract residents and reinforce a strong sense of identity.

This chapter outlines Central City’s outdoor recreation assets, challenges and opportunities, and recommends strategies for each sector: Biking, ATVs & Motor Sports, Winter Sports, Heritage Tourism, and Scenic Tourism. Together, these strategies form a framework for expanding Central City’s tourism base, enhancing recreation infrastructure and reinforcing the city’s long-term economic resilience.

VISION

Central City will emerge as a premier high-elevation outdoor recreation hub for the Denver region. The city will build a unified system of trails, events, recreation amenities and heritage experiences that connect residents and visitors to the natural landscape, historic resources and surrounding mountain destinations. Outdoor recreation will serve as a catalyst for economic growth, small business development and preservation of the city’s unique heritage.

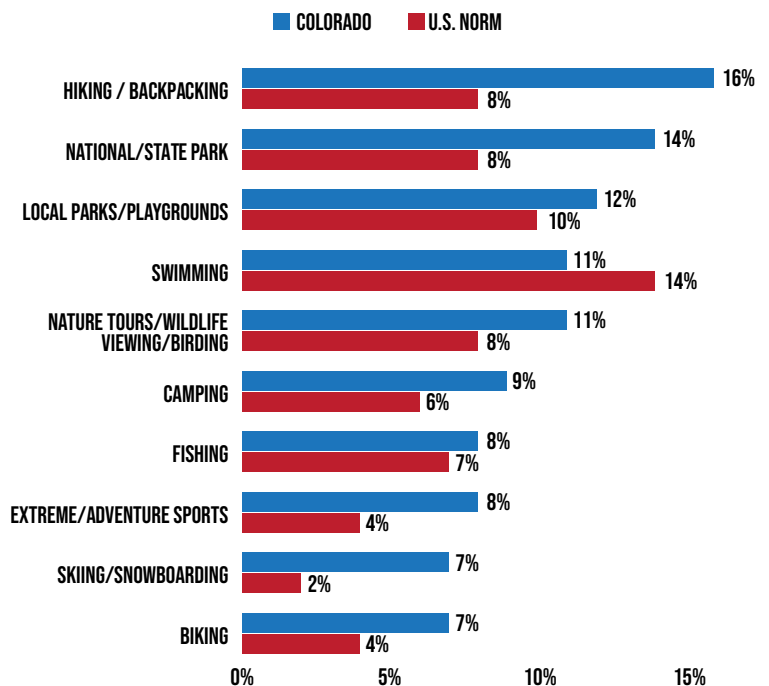
FIG. 2.3 COLORADO OUTDOOR RECREATION MAP



OUTDOOR RECREATION TOURISM GOALS

- ED-O.1. Diversify tourism by expanding outdoor recreation options that complement gaming and cultural programming.
- ED-O.2. Develop trail and route connectivity linking Central City with Maryland Mountain, Idaho Springs and Pewabic terrain.
- ED-O.3. Establish a four-season recreation identity that brings visitors year-round.
- ED-O.4. Strengthen heritage interpretation through outdoor recreation and scenic touring experiences.
- ED-O.5. Activate vacant parcels and underused areas for recreation programming.
- ED-O.6. Promote regional partnerships with neighboring towns, agencies and recreation organizations.

FIG. 2.4 OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN COLORADO VS. THE U.S. NORM



OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISIONS & STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

I. OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISIONS



A. BICYCLING



A Cyclist on the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway



SUMMARY

Central City has exceptional terrain for mountain biking: steep grades, forested hillsides, historic mining roads and unmatched scenic views. It sits adjacent to two major regional trail systems—Maryland Mountain and the Idaho Springs/Clear Creek network—and near the potential Pewabic Mountain Bike Park site.

Additionally, Central City serves as a gateway to the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway offering an incredible destination for road bikers. Proximity to Denver and the new 18.8 mile Clear Creek Trail make Central City an ideal location to offer biking of all styles and levels.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Create a unified regional trail connection.
- Develop a bike-friendly downtown environment.
- Host signature cycling events tied to regional branding.
- Convert vacant buildings into bike shops, rental hubs and shuttle depots.



STRATEGIES

ED-O.A. Build a Central City–Maryland Mountain Connector Trail.

ED-O.B. Develop a Downtown Bike Hub including rentals, repair services and visitor orientation.

ED-O.C. Launch a Peak to Peak Road Cycling Race in partnership with CDOT.

ED-O.D. Create interpretive cycling routes highlighting mining history and scenery.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

- [Fruita, CO](#) – Mountain biking transformed the local economy.
- [Grand Junction, CO](#) – Urban and desert trail systems drove recreation tourism.
- [Salida, CO](#) – Downtown revival supported by robust trail network.
- [Bentonville, AR](#) – Urban trail integration created a globally recognized biking destination.



Aerial view of Ruby Hill urban bike park in Denver, CO

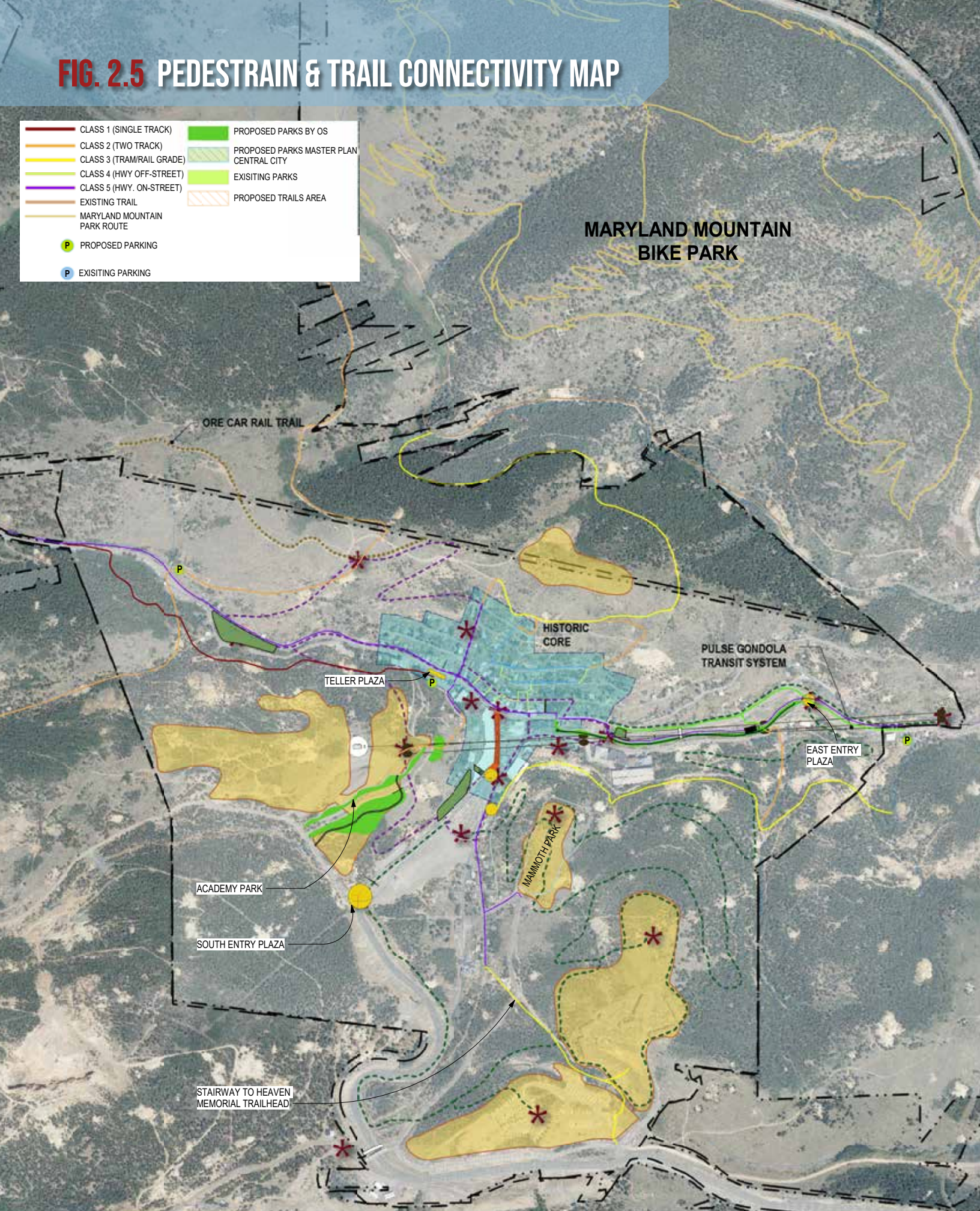


Ruby Hill urban bike park in Denver, CO

FIG. 2.5 PEDESTRAIN & TRAIL CONNECTIVITY MAP

- CLASS 1 (SINGLE TRACK)
- CLASS 2 (TWO TRACK)
- CLASS 3 (TRAM/RAIL GRADE)
- CLASS 4 (HWY OFF-STREET)
- CLASS 5 (HWY. ON-STREET)
- EXISTING TRAIL
- MARYLAND MOUNTAIN PARK ROUTE
- PROPOSED PARKS BY OS
- PROPOSED PARKS MASTER PLAN CENTRAL CITY
- EXISTING PARKS
- PROPOSED TRAILS AREA
- P PROPOSED PARKING
- P EXISTING PARKING

MARYLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK





Family Riding ATVs near Central City



B. ATVs & MOTOR SPORTS



SUMMARY

Central City’s mining-era road system, rugged terrain and backcountry access roads create ideal conditions for ATV/UTV recreation and 4x4 touring. There is already noticeable recreational offroad activity in and around the City.

Thoughtful development of dedicated trail systems will direct activity to desired areas and encourage visitation.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Strengthen the city as a responsible off-road gateway.
- Establish dedicated routes and staging areas.
- Integrate heritage interpretation into motor-tourism loops.
- Partner with outfitters and safety organizations.



STRATEGIES

- ED-O.E. Create a Gilpin Backcountry Loop with wayfinding and scenic overlooks.
- ED-O.F. Construct a formal ATV/UTV staging area near the gaming and historic districts.
- ED-O.G. Host an annual ATV and Off-Road Festival to extend the summer/fall tourism season.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

- [Silverton Alpine Loop, CO](#) – Connected OHV routes bolstered small-town tourism.
- [Rangely OHV Rally, CO](#) – Event-based off-road tourism model.
- [Moab, UT](#) – International OHV destination built on managed trail systems.



C. WINTER SPORTS

CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Central City receives consistent winter weather but currently lacks built infrastructure for winter recreation. The altitude

OPPORTUNITIES

- Activate vacant parcels for winter pop-up events.
- Develop compact winter recreation amenities to attract youth and families.
- Host winter festivals that complement the historic district.

STRATEGIES

ED-O.H. Create a Pop-Up Snowboard and Sledding Park that operates on weekends.

ED-O.I. Add lighting, music and vendors to form a winter festival zone.

ED-O.J. Develop snowshoe and fat-bike loops using existing roads and trails.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

- [Ruby Hill Rail Yard, Denver](#) – Free urban snowboard park with strong community use.
- [Howelsen Hill, Steamboat Springs](#) – A community ski hill with year-round programming.
- [Leadville Winter Fat Bike Series](#) – Uses mining roads for winter recreation.



Snowmaking at Ruby Hill Railyard in Denver, CO



Ruby Hill Railyard urban snowboarding in Denver, CO



Teller House entrance, Central City, CO 2023



D. HERITAGE TOURISM



CONDITIONS SUMMARY

Central City’s cultural assets—including the Opera House, historic cemeteries, mining structures and the National Historic Landmark District—form the city’s strongest differentiating factors.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Blend outdoor recreation with heritage interpretation.
- Tie trail systems to storytelling and cultural destinations.
- Strengthen the city’s identity as a place where history and adventure coexist.



STRATEGIES

ED-O.K. Develop interpretive trail loops tied to mining history, geology and architecture.

ED-O.L. Host heritage-based cycling or ATV events that highlight historic features.

ED-O.M. Create seasonal outdoor exhibits that animate the historic district.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

- [Leadville Trail 100](#) – Integrates heritage storytelling with outdoor endurance events.
- [Virginia City, NV](#) – Uses heritage and scenic touring to support its visitor economy.
- [Georgetown Loop Railroad](#) – Connects heritage and tourism through experiential activity.



Mike Keeler, Central City historian and storyteller at the Annual Central City’s Cemetery Crawl.

Photo courtesy of Visit Central City CO



Local celebrants on Madam Bunch Day

Photo courtesy of Visit Central City CO



Central City Opera House 2023



E. SCENIC TOURISM



CONDITIONS SUMMARY

The Peak to Peak Scenic Byway brings thousands of travelers through the region annually, but Central City captures only a small share of this traffic. Colorado is [actively promoting](#) the Byway and Central City is the southern gateway.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Establish the city as a key waypoint on the byway.
- Offer scenic touring events tied to cars, motorcycles and van-life travel.
- Build interpretive pullouts and scenic viewpoints around the historic district.



STRATEGIES

ED-O.N. Launch Peak-to-Peak touring events including motorcycle rallies, classic car weekends and van-life festivals.

ED-O.O. Create a network of scenic overlooks with interpretive signage.

ED-O.P. Partner with state agencies to enhance wayfinding along the byway.

RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

- [Telluride Cars & Colors Festival](#) – Scenic touring and automotive culture festival.
- [Cripple Creek Veterans Rally](#) – Motorcycle touring event supporting local tourism.
- [RendezVan at Mt. Bachelor](#) – Van-life mountain festival blending recreation and scenic camping.



Coeur D'Alene Mine | Central City, CO 2024



Peak to Peak Scenic Byway Map courtesy of CDOT




Fall Colors on the Peak to Peak Scenic Byway. Photo by Sally Pearce, CDOT





Chair Garden near Central City Opera House 2023

A. SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (1-3 YEARS)

- 
 ED-O.A.1. Develop a Central City Outdoor Recreation Master Plan.
- ED-O.A.2. Build initial trail connections to Maryland Mountain.
- ED-O.A.3. Establish pilot winter pop-up events.
- ED-O.A.4. Launch one signature event (bike race, van-life weekend or ATV festival).
- ED-O.A.5. Develop a recreation-focused branding campaign.

 **B. MID-TERM ACTIONS (3-7 YEARS)**

- ED-G.B.1. Develop staging areas, trailheads and bike/ped amenities.
- ED-G.B.2. Formalize ATV/UTV routes and interpretive signage systems.
- ED-G.B.3. Expand fat-bike and snowshoe trail networks.
- ED-G.B.4. Repurpose vacant lots into recreation or event spaces.

 **C. LONG-TERM ACTIONS (7+ YEARS)**

- ED-O.C.1. Construct a Pewabic Mountain Bike Park or similar facility.
- ED-O.C.2. Achieve full regional trail connectivity with Idaho Springs and Black Hawk trail systems.
- ED-O.C.3. Establish Central City as a recognized four-season recreation destination.

IV. CONCLUSION

Central City has natural assets, heritage character, and regional position to grow into a premier outdoor recreation hub for the Denver metro region. By investing in trail connectivity, events, winter activities and scenic touring infrastructure, the city can strengthen its tourism economy, support local businesses and expand year-round visitation. Outdoor recreation represents a sustainable growth path that complements Central City’s historic identity and helps ensure long-term community resilience.



Central City Opera performs *Kiss Me Kate*

Photo courtesy of Visit Central City CO

2. ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

SUMMARY: ARTS & CULTURE AS A LEGACY AND A LAUNCHPAD

Arts and culture define Central City’s identity as profoundly as its historic architecture or gaming history. The city’s legacy as a cultural destination dates back nearly a century, anchored by the world-renowned Central City Opera and an architectural environment that inspires artists, performers, and audiences alike.

Yet APA’s [Creative Placemaking and Economic Development guidelines](#) emphasize that cultural identity alone is not enough; arts and culture must be actively cultivated, embedded in economic strategy, and nurtured as year-round assets rather than seasonal amenities.

With the renovation of the Belvidere Theater—a historic gem being transformed into a flexible performing arts venue—Central City has an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen its cultural economy, expand its visitor base, and cultivate a thriving artistic community that contributes to the city’s prosperity 365 days a year.

CURRENT CONDITIONS: A CULTURAL ECOSYSTEM ROOTED IN HISTORIC PLACES

I. THE CENTRAL CITY OPERA AS A CULTURAL ANCHOR

For decades, the Central City Opera (CCO) has brought world-class performances to the historic Opera House, making Central City one of the smallest communities in the nation to host a major professional opera company. The summer festival attracts thousands, supports local employment, and generates significant tourism spending.

The seasonal nature of the festival highlights a structural challenge: most of this cultural energy—and the economic activity it generates—occurs only a few months each year.

II. THE BELVIDERE THEATER: A REVIVAL WITH TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL

The renovation of the Belvidere Theater represents one of the most significant cultural investments in recent Central City history. Once restored, the Belvidere will offer:

- A flexible, year-round performance venue
- Space for theater troupes, musicians, film screenings, community events, and educational programs
- A training and rehearsal venue complementary to the Opera’s artistic mission
- A cultural anchor that activates the southern gateway to Main Street
- A platform for local, regional, and touring artists seeking intimate historic performance spaces

The Belvidere’s restoration aligns with [National Trust for Historic Preservation recommendations](#) for reusing landmark buildings as economic drivers and community anchors.



The 1972 film [The Duchess and the Dirtwater Fox](#) set at the Belvidere Theater. Photo courtesy of Visit Central City

III. LOCAL ARTIST ECOSYSTEM: EMERGING BUT UNDER-RESOURCED

Central City attracts painters, musicians, writers, makers, and performers—drawn by its character and affordability—but many lack stable workspace, affordable housing, or consistent income opportunities outside of Opera season.

Both APA and the [NEA](#) emphasize that cultivating artist communities requires:

- Affordable live/work space
- Year-round performance and exhibit venues
- Regular programming and public visibility
- Organizational support and predictable funding streams

The renovated Belvidere Theater, combined with Opera House programming and historic building reuse, positions Central City to become a mountain creative capital.



*Gilpin County Arts Annula Fundraiser & Silent Auction 2023
Photo courtesy of Visit Central City*



ARTS & CULTURE TOURISM GOALS

A thriving arts ecosystem is the backbone of downtown revitalization, cultural tourism growth, and community identity. By connecting the Opera, the Belvidere Theater, local galleries, historic buildings, and public spaces, Central City can foster a year-round arts and culture economy with measurable economic benefits:

- A. Expanded event programming that draws visitors beyond summer
- B. Artist residency opportunities that activate vacant spaces
- C. Creative retail and cultural businesses that enhance Main Street
- D. Cross-pollination between gaming tourism and cultural tourism
- E. Heritage-based arts experiences linked to the Landmark District
- F. A stronger local identity as an arts-forward mountain community

Through these efforts, arts and culture become not only a community asset but also a predictable, resilient economic driver.



GOAL ED-A.1 — Cultivate a Four-Season Arts & Culture Economy Rooted in Celebrating the Central City Opera, the Belvidere Theater, and Local Artists.



STRATEGIES



STRATEGY ED-A.A — Leverage the Central City Opera as a Year-Round Institution



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

ED-A.A.1. Host off-season chamber concerts, recitals, and workshops in the Opera House.

ED-A.A.2. Partner with CCO for masterclasses, artistic residencies, and backstage tours.

ED-A.A.3. Develop cross-promotional programming between the Opera and the Belvidere Theater.

ED-A.A.4. Collaborate with universities for seasonal music intensives, opera training, and student productions.



STRATEGY ED-A.B — ESTABLISH THE BELVIDERE THEATER AS A YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY ANCHOR



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

ED-A.B.1. Position the Belvidere as the city's primary all-season venue for small theater, music, film, spoken word, comedy, and community events.

ED-A.B.2. Use the Belvidere's flexible layout to support:

ED-A.B.3. Local theater companies

ED-A.B.4. Independent musicians

ED-A.B.5. Film festivals

ED-A.B.6. Artist-led workshops

ED-A.B.7. Public meetings and civic programming

ED-A.B.8. Coordinate programming between Belvidere stakeholders, Opera staff, and local arts organizations to maximize scheduling, visibility, and economic impact.

ED-A.B.9. Pursue [NEA "Our Town" grants](#) and [Colorado Creative Industries \(CCI\) funding](#) for Belvidere programming.



 **STRATEGY ED-A.C — DEVELOP AN ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE NETWORK AND LOCAL CREATIVE COMMUNITY**

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-A.C.1. Convert vacant historic buildings into affordable live/work units to attract and retain artists. (“Preservation Through Activation”).

ED-A.C.2. Establish a Central City Creative District to obtain CCI certification and funding.

ED-A.C.3. Offer micro-grants for artist-led exhibitions, performances, and public art.

ED-A.C.4. Provide storefront spaces for rotating pop-up galleries, boutiques, studios, and maker spaces.

These initiatives follow APA’s Economic Development Through the Arts model.

 **STRATEGY ED-A.D — EXPAND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING BEYOND SUMMER**

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-A.D.1. Coordinate a Year-Round Arts Calendar featuring monthly events.

ED-A.D.2. Launch seasonal events such as:

- Winter Lights Festival
- Belvidere Film & Music Series
- Spring Makers Market
- Fall Arts & Heritage Weekend

ED-A.D.3. Activate public spaces with murals, interactive exhibits, historic interpretation, and temporary art installations.

APA’s placemaking and NEA’s community arts frameworks both highlight the importance of consistent, predictable programming for economic vitality.

 **STRATEGY ED-A.E — INTEGRATE ARTS & CULTURE INTO DOWNTOWN ACTIVATION AND TOURISM**

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

ED-A.E.1. Develop an arts-forward brand identity linking the Opera, Belvidere, Main Street, and historic assets.

ED-A.E.2. Use cultural wayfinding, public art, and interpretive design to guide visitors.

ED-A.E.3. Encourage gaming operators to participate in cultural sponsorships, rotating exhibitions, and performance partnerships.

ED-A.E.4. Promote cultural tourism packages combining:

- Gaming
- Performances
- Heritage tours
- Local food
- Outdoor recreation

This matches national best practices for cultural tourism clustering.

CONCLUSION: A CREATIVE FUTURE BUILT ON HISTORIC FOUNDATIONS

Central City stands at the threshold of becoming one of Colorado’s most vibrant small-town arts destinations. By leveraging the prestige of the Central City Opera, the year-round potential of the Belvidere Theater, the authenticity of the Landmark District, and the talent of local artists, the city can build a cultural ecosystem that:

- Attracts visitors in every season
- Diversifies the local economy
- Revitalizes historic buildings
- Supports artists and creative workers
- Enhances downtown vitality
- Strengthens community identity

The Belvidere Theater renovation is more than a building project—it is the catalyst for a cultural and economic transformation. Together with the Opera and a growing creative community, it positions Central City as a mountain arts capital with a prosperous future.



Artist concept of multi-family housing character by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

3. NON-TOURISM SECTORS



INTRODUCTION SUMMARY: BUILDING A COMPLETE MOUNTAIN ECONOMY

While tourism and gaming remain Central City's primary economic drivers, a resilient and thriving community requires strong non-tourism sectors that support year-round residents, families, and workers. APA's [Economic Development Handbook](#) emphasizes that communities dependent on volatile or seasonal sectors must cultivate a diverse economic ecosystem—one that provides essential services, supports local enterprises, and ensures equitable access to opportunity.

Central City's long-term prosperity rests on strengthening the pillars of everyday community life:

- Affordable and workforce housing
- Neighborhood-serving commercial development
- Public and community services
- Small businesses and local entrepreneurs

These sectors form the infrastructure of a complete community—where people can live, work, shop, grow families, and fully participate in civic life.



HOUSING AS ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE: THE FOUNDATION OF NON-TOURISM PROSPERITY

Housing in Central City is not merely a land-use issue—it is economic infrastructure essential to every non-tourism sector. A community without adequate and attainable housing cannot sustain a local workforce, attract families, retain young adults, or support small businesses. The city’s limited housing supply, aging historic stock, and constrained land base have shaped an economy heavily reliant on commuters, many of whom travel long distances through difficult mountain conditions.

FILLING THE LOCAL DEMAND FOR WORKFORCE HOUSING

Central City experiences a chronic shortage of housing for workers in gaming, hospitality, retail, food service, arts, public safety, and municipal operations. Because employees cannot find local housing, businesses face:

- High turnover
- Limited staffing capacity
- Reduced service hours
- Higher operational costs
- Lower economic resilience

Providing workforce housing—through preservation, infill, modular units, and mixed-income developments—directly strengthens the local economy. Workers who live locally spend locally, supporting grocery stores, childcare providers, restaurants, general retail, and service businesses that currently struggle to gain a foothold.

HOW LARGE-SCALE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHENS THE LOCAL ECONOMY

While small projects remain important, well-designed large-scale housing development brings transformational benefits:

1. CONSTRUCTION-PHASE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

- A. Jobs in trades, engineering, architecture, and surveying
- B. Local spending on materials and equipment
- C. Increased permit and fee revenue for the city

2. LONG-TERM FISCAL STABILITY

- A. Expanded property-tax base
- B. Increased utility revenue
- C. Higher sales tax from household spending
- D. Reduced volatility compared to gaming-dependent revenue streams

3. DEMAND GENERATION FOR COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL USES

Large-scale housing development provides the year-round customer base needed to support:

- A. Grocery and convenience retail
- B. Medical and wellness clinics
- C. Childcare and education providers
- D. Restaurants, cafés, and retail shops
- E. Professional services and co-working spaces

4. ACTIVATION OF VACANT AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Housing revitalizes historic structures through adaptive reuse and helps maintain the National Historic Landmark District as a living, functioning neighborhood.

5. POPULATION GROWTH THAT ATTRACTS INVESTMENT

A growing, stable residential base signals to businesses and developers that Central City is ready for long-term commercial and institutional investment.

[The APA’s Housing Policy Guide and Sustaining Places frameworks](#) emphasize that housing is the single most important factor in building local economic resilience, especially in small mountain communities with unique geographic limitations.



COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT: STRENGTHENING EVERYDAY ECONOMIC LIFE

Central City’s economic diversification depends on expanding commercial services that allow residents to meet daily needs locally. At present, many essential services—groceries, childcare, health care, household goods—are located outside the city, creating “leakage” to neighboring communities and limiting economic circulation.

A YEAR-ROUND COMMERCIAL ECOSYSTEM

A thriving non-tourism economy includes:

- Neighborhood grocery and convenience retail
- Childcare and early learning centers
- Family-friendly restaurants and cafés
- Medical, dental, and wellness services
- Hardware, home goods, and essential supplies
- Professional offices and small-scale co-working spaces

These establishments become viable only when the resident population grows, reinforcing the connection between housing development and commercial success.

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Local entrepreneurs are vital to small-town economies. Central City can support them by:

- Repurposing vacant storefronts as incubator spaces
- Offering micro-grants and façade improvement programs
- Encouraging pop-ups, markets, and rotating retail
- Supporting cooperative and shared business models

This approach aligns with APA’s Economic Gardening methodology, focused on supporting local businesses rather than exclusively recruiting external firms.



NON-TOURISM ECONOMIC GOALS

A complete economy requires robust community services that enhance quality of life and enable residents to remain in Central City long-term. Key service areas include:

- Emergency services and public safety
- Water, sewer, and infrastructure capacity
- Broadband and digital connectivity
- Transit and mobility
- Parks and recreation
- Civic and cultural facilities

Investments in infrastructure and services not only support residents but also create the foundation necessary for new housing, businesses, and community amenities.

Federal and state funds—from [DOLA](#), [HUD](#), [USDA](#) Rural Development, and Colorado CDOT—provide opportunities for Central City to expand or modernize its service infrastructure.



GOAL ED-N.1 — BUILD A STRONG, RESIDENT-FOCUSED NON-TOURISM ECONOMY THAT SUPPORTS YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY LIFE



STRATEGY ED-N.A — EXPAND AFFORDABLE AND WORKFORCE HOUSING TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL ECONOMIC STABILITY



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

ED-N.A.1. Prioritize housing development—small and large scale—as core economic development.

ED-N.A.2. Leverage preservation incentives to convert historic buildings into housing.

ED-N.A.3. Use zoning, incentives, and partnerships to support mixed-income development.

ED-N.A.4. Align new housing with workforce needs across all non-tourism sectors.



STRATEGY ED-N.B — GROW COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL SERVICES



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

ED-N.B.1. Recruit essential services such as childcare, groceries, clinics, and convenience retail.

ED-N.B.2. Encourage mixed-use development in walkable areas.

ED-N.B.3. Support small business formation through grants, pop-up spaces, and adaptive reuse.

 **STRATEGY ED-N.C — ENHANCE COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

- ED-N.C.1. Invest in utilities, mobility improvements, broadband, and civic amenities.
- ED-N.C.2. Coordinate with regional partners to expand social services and healthcare.
- ED-N.C.3. Align capital improvement planning with housing and commercial growth targets.

 **STRATEGY ED-N.D — SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS**

 **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

- ED-N.D.1. Establish programs for start-up support, business coaching, and micro-lending.
- ED-N.D.2. Activate vacant spaces as incubators, studios, workshops, or co-working environments.
- ED-N.D.3. Encourage collaboration between schools, nonprofits, and business groups.

CONCLUSION: A BALANCED, RESILIENT, NON-TOURISM ECONOMY FOR CENTRAL CITY'S FUTURE

Strengthening non-tourism sectors gives Central City the stability and security needed to weather economic shifts, support full-time residents, and maintain a high quality of life. Affordable and workforce housing, commercial services, community infrastructure, and local entrepreneurship form the backbone of a resilient economy—one that complements tourism without depending on it exclusively.

By integrating housing, commerce, and community services into a unified economic strategy, Central City positions itself for long-term prosperity rooted in its people, its neighborhoods, and its historic character.

2.4 BRANDING, MARKETING, AND PROMOTION

IS BRANDING AND MARKETING THE BEST INVESTMENT FOR CENTRAL CITY?

A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF VISITOR RETENTION CHALLENGES**

Central City faces a long-standing challenge: visitors do not return at high rates, especially compared to nearby gaming and tourism competitors. While branding and marketing efforts can improve awareness and influence visitation patterns, they are rarely the most effective standalone investment for communities where product quality, experience gaps, and physical conditions weaken the visitor experience.

Research from the American Planning Association (APA), the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), and Destination Marketing Association International (DMAI) consistently shows that tourists return to places that feel vibrant, convenient, easy to navigate, and full of things to do—not places that simply advertise more.

Marketing brings visitors the first time. Experience brings them back.

***See Appendix B for the expanded analysis.*

 **STRATEGY ED-M.A — IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CENTRAL CITY AS A DESTINATION PRIOR TO FURTHER INVESTMENT IN MARKETING**

Enhance public areas and services, reduce commercial vacancies, and invest in commercial and residential development prior to spending funds on marketing to new visitors.



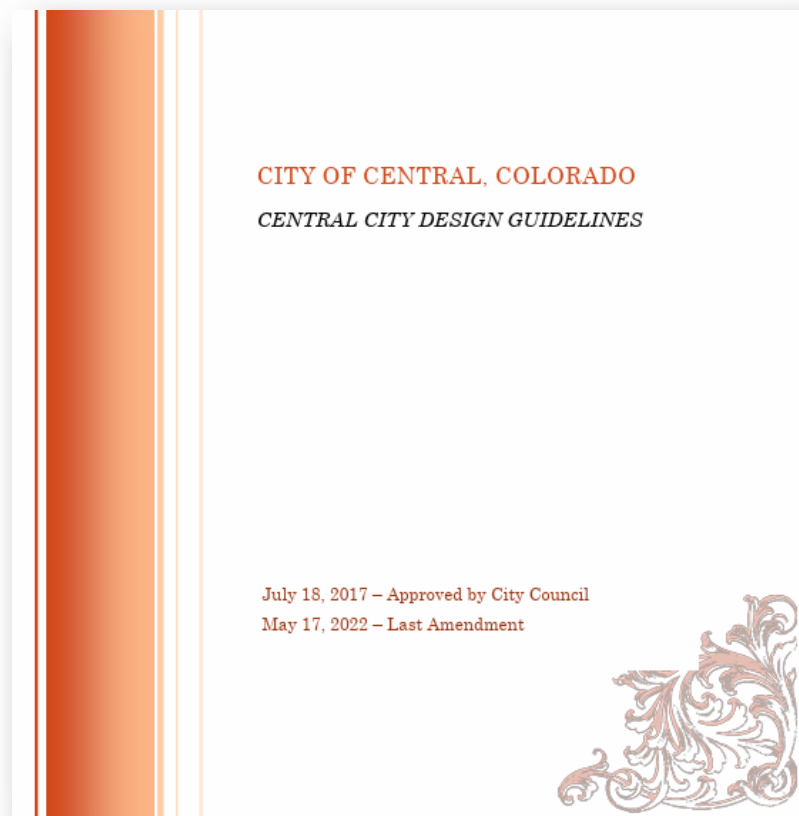
2.5 LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Central City’s built environment is defined by its extraordinary 19th-century mining-era architecture, steep topography, narrow streets, and nationally recognized historic district. These defining qualities are also the source of significant development challenges. The City’s [2023 Land Development Code \(LDC\) and 2022 Design Guidelines](#) were created to protect this heritage but now impose cumulative layers of regulation that restrict feasible new development, inhibit reinvestment, and conflict with the City’s goals for year-round economic activity, modern housing, and sustainable growth.

This Comprehensive Plan calls for a coordinated modernization of these regulatory tools to preserve genuine historic character while enabling compatible new development, foster housing supply, expand economic opportunity, and ensure long-term stewardship of Central City’s built heritage.

Note: Code analysis and recommendations are regarding the current regulatory documents (at the time of this writing) only. These are [2023 Land Development Code \(LDC\) and 2022 Design Guidelines](#).



CURRENT ZONING DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS

RCE	RESOURCE DISTRICT MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 25 FT REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 10 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY LAND USE: LIMITED RESIDENTIAL, SFR, MINING, OPEN SPACE, AGRICULTURE	TSL	TRANSITIONAL ZONE MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 25 FT REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 5 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY LAND USE: CIVIC, HEALTHCARE, HOSPITALITY, COMMERCIAL
LDR	LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 30 FT REAR SETBACK: 30 FT PRIMARY, 10 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 10 FT PRIMARY, 7 FT ACCESSORY LAND USE: SINGLE FAMILY DETACHED, LIMITED OTHER RES.	GGG	GREGORY GULCH GAMING MAX HEIGHT: 53'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY, *ADJUSTABLE VIA PUD FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 15 FT REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 5 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY LAND USE: GAMING, HOSPITALITY, RETAIL,
MDR	MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 25 FT REAR SETBACK: 25 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 5 FT (PRIMARY & ACCESSORY) LAND USE: DENSE URBAN RESIDENTIAL, SFR, TOWNHOMES, LIMITED MFR	GPC	GENERAL PURPOSE COMMERCIAL MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 25 FT REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 10 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY LAND USE: CIVIC, HEALTHCARE, HOSPITALITY, RETAIL, BUSINESS
HDR	HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 20 FT REAR SETBACK: 25 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 5 FT (PRIMARY & ACCESSORY) LAND USE: SFR, MFR	LCC	LIMITED COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL MAX HEIGHT: 35'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: 25 FT REAR SETBACK: 25 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 5 FT (PRIMARY & ACCESSORY) LAND USE: CIVIC, HEALTHCARE, BUSINESS
HDG	CURRENT ZONING: HDG MAX HEIGHT: 53'-0" PRIMARY, 30'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: N/A REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 0/5 FT (PRIMARY & ACCESSORY) LAND USE: HOSPITALITY, GAMING, RESTAURANT, RETAIL	IND	INDUSTRIAL MAX HEIGHT: MAX HEIGHT: 50'-0" PRIMARY, 50'-0" ACCESSORY FRONT & STREET SIDE SETBACK: N/A REAR SETBACK: 15 FT PRIMARY, 5 FT ACCESSORY SIDE SETBACK: 0/5 FT (PRIMARY & ACCESSORY) LAND USE: EDUCATIONAL, LIMITED CIVIC, STORAGE

NOTES:

1. BUILDING HEIGHTS MEASURED FROM FRONT STREET SIDE AVERAGE BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW POINTS. SEE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE (LDC) SEC. 16-10-101
2. TABLE DOES NOT INCLUDE PARKING SETBACKS, NOR LOT AREA STANDARDS.
3. SEE LDC TABLE 16-4-200 FOR NONRESIDENTIAL AND MIXED-USE LOT AND BUILDING STANDARDS
4. FULL LAND USES PER LDC 16-3-300



2. SUMMARY OF REGULATORY BARRIERS

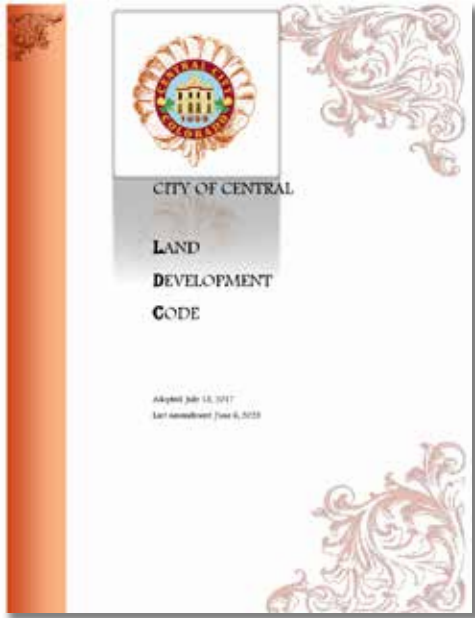
CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF THE LDC (2023) AND DESIGN GUIDELINES (2022)

The LDC and Design Guidelines work together in ways that unintentionally create a development environment more restrictive than most peer mountain communities. The combined effect includes:

- Overly prescriptive site planning requirements
- Height and massing limitations that prevent feasible mixed-use and hospitality projects
- Strict historic appearance mandates that encourage architectural mimicry
- Parking requirements are incompatible with historic lots
- Bufferyard and adjacency standards designed for suburban rather than historic urban contexts
- Slope and ridgeline regulations that severely limit building envelopes on most undeveloped land
- Limited allowance for missing-middle or multifamily housing
- Lengthy, uncertain review processes that deter investment

These constraints have slowed reinvestment in the historic core, suppressed housing production, and limited the City's ability to diversify its economy.





3.2 PARKING REQUIREMENTS MISALIGNED WITH THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The LDC requires full parking compliance before construction approvals (Sec. 16-8-201). The code does not exempt the Historic District, nor does it provide:

- A formal shared parking program
- On-street parking credits
- District parking or payment-in-lieu options



IMPACT:

Most historic lots cannot physically accommodate required parking, blocking adaptive reuse and housing in upper stories.

3.3 LAND USE ADJACENCY AND BUFFERYARD REQUIREMENTS

Bufferyard rules (Sec. 16-5-403) and adjacency expectations (Sec. 16-5-101) impose suburban-style separation standards on a historic downtown where buildings traditionally share walls or have very small lots.



IMPACT:

These requirements reduce buildable area, complicate infill, and contradict the compact form that defines Central City's character.

3.4 RESTRICTIVE HOUSING PERMISSIONS

The residential use table (Sec. 16-3-301) allows duplexes, townhomes, and multifamily only in limited zones, with many housing types subject to conditional review.



IMPACT:

Workforce housing is difficult to produce, and developers often choose communities with more predictable by-right zoning.

3.5 SLOPE AND RIDGELINE DEVELOPMENT RESTRICTIONS

Sec. 16-5-106 prohibits new lots on slopes of 30% or greater unless a compliant envelope exists; ridgeline regulations impose strict massing breakdowns.



IMPACT:

Given the City's steep terrain, this sterilizes large portions of developable land.

3. 2023 LDC ANALYSIS: BARRIERS TO INFILL, HOUSING, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

3.1 HEIGHT, MASSING, AND BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSTRAINTS

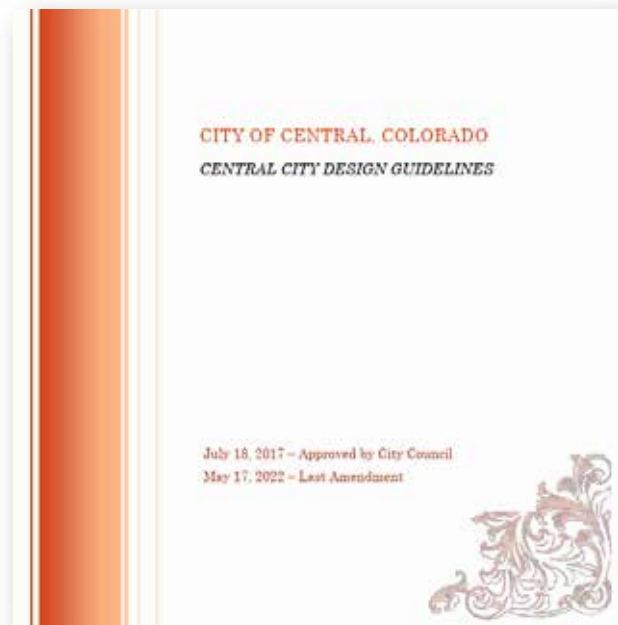
Key LDC sections—including Sec. 16-5-600–603 (Ridgeline Overlay) and Sec. 16-2-101/102 (Historic district overlays)—stack height controls with mass fragmentation requirements and aesthetic criteria. The result is:

- Effective height caps of 25–30 feet in the Historic Core, with no allowance for upper-story stepbacks
- Limited flexibility for mechanical equipment, elevator overruns, or multi-story buildings needed for hotel and housing feasibility
- Fragmented massing requirements that prevent efficient floorplates



IMPACT:

Mixed-use buildings, boutique hotels, and multifamily housing become hard or impossible to finance under contemporary building codes and construction costs.



4. 2022 DESIGN GUIDELINES ANALYSIS: COMPATIBILITY VS. PSEUDO-HISTORIC MIMICRY

4.1 MANDATED USE OF 1859–1918 ARCHITECTURAL PRECEDENTS

The Design Guidelines repeatedly require that all new construction “accurately draw upon historic precedents” and that examples be taken only from structures within the 1859–1918 period of significance.



IMPACT:

This creates a strong tendency toward pseudo-historic mimicry, limiting contemporary architectural expression essential for modern building codes, sustainability, and market needs.

4.2 RESTRICTIONS ON SITE PLANNING AND PARCEL ASSEMBLY

Guidelines 1–3 require repeating historic settlement patterns, discourage parcel consolidation, and prohibit altering historic circulation.



IMPACT:

These restrictions prevent creation of viable development sites for housing or mixed-use projects.

4.3 PRESCRIPTIVE ARCHITECTURAL REQUIREMENTS

Neighborhood chapters mandate that new buildings match historic forms, proportions, materials, roof types, and footprints.

Component-specific guidelines require:

- Porch and deck replication
- Historic window ratios
- Historic fence types
- Historic color palettes
- Cladding of new foundations in historic materials



IMPACT:

These mandates suppress diversity, increase costs, and pressure designers to recreate 19th-century architecture rather than design compatible contemporary buildings.

4.4 CONFLICTS WITH SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR’S HISTORIC PRESERVATION STANDARDS

The following conflicts are present:

- Standard 3 prohibits creating a false sense of historical development; however, the Guidelines encourage replication of historic styles and details.
- Standard 9 requires differentiation between new and historic work; the Guidelines push new construction toward visual sameness.
- Standards 9 & 10 allow contemporary materials and distinguishable new elements, which are restricted or prohibited by the Guidelines.



IMPACT:

The guidelines create outcomes inconsistent with nationally recognized preservation best practices.

5. INTEGRATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Central City can simultaneously protect historic character and support reinvestment by implementing the following integrated reforms.

5.1 LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE (LDC) REFORMS

A. HEIGHT & MASSING MODERNIZATION (SEE LDC SEC. 16-4)

i. Introduce stepback-based height/bulk systems:

- a. 25–30 ft streetwall in the Historic Core
- b. Up to 40–55 ft with upper-level stepbacks
- c. 55–85 ft in gateway and non-historic district sites.
- d. Remove 2 story limits for building types other than single-family-detached residential.

ii. Allow setback and bulk flexibility as administrative review for efficient floorplates for hotel, multi-family residential, cottage lots, and town lots. Specific changes per zone:

a. RESOURCE DISTRICT (RCE)

- 35' Max Height
- Limited New Construction
- Low Density Residential, Mining Uses

b. LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)

- 35' Max Height
- Land Use: Low Density Residential, Single Family Detached

c. MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)

- 45' Max Height
- Land Use: Dense Urban Residential, Single Family Residential, Duplex, Multiplex, Townhomes, Live Work, Residential Mixed Use

d. HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (HDR)

- 75' Max Height
- Land Use: Multi-Family Apartments, Condominiums, Townhomes

e. RESIDENTIAL MIXED-USE (RMU)

- New Recommended Zone
- 75' Max Height
- Land Use: Limited Commercial (Retail), Multi-Family Residential

f. COMMERCIAL MIXED-USE (MU)

- New Recommended Zone
- 125' Max Height
- Land Use: Commercial, Mixed-Use, Multi-Family Residential

g. TRANSITIONAL ZONE (TSL): RECOMMENDED FOR REMOVAL

h. GREGORY GULCH GAMING (GGG)

- 350' Max Height per Planned Development Process
- Land Use: Gaming, Commercial Mixed-Use
- New Construction, Limited Existing Buildings

i. GENERAL PURPOSE COMMERCIAL (GPC)

- 75' Max Height
- General Commercial, Indoor/Outdoor, Light Industrial, Public Uses

j. LIMITED COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL (LCC)

- 75' Max Height
- General Commercial

k. GROWTH AREAS (SEE CHAPTER 6)

- As Per 2020 Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)
- Height & Density by Village (See Future Land Use Below)

l. FUTURE LAND USE: VILLAGE-SPECIFIC DENSITY & HEIGHT (SEE CHAPTER 6 FUTURE LAND USE)

1. BOODLE VILLAGE

- 75' Height
- Land Use: Mixed-Use, Commercial, Medium-Density Residential, Outdoor Recreation

2. LAKE GULCH VILLAGE

- 125' Height
- Land Use: Multi-Family Residential, Commercial Mixed Use

3. QUARRY WEST

- Height and Land Use to follow Low Density Residential (LDR)

B. PARKING REFORM



- Commission a new parking study to analyze current conditions, practical visitor vs. local parking use patterns of available spaces, peak event analysis, and make recommendations based on future land use plans.
- Establish a Historic District Parking Exemption Area.
- Allow shared parking agreements.
- Replace payment-in-lieu provisions with an in-kind practical alternative.
- Credit on-street parking adjacent to properties.
- Incentives for structured public parking

C. HOUSING ENABLEMENT



- Legalize missing-middle housing across all residential districts.
- Make multifamily and mixed-use residential by-right in commercial zones.

- Incentivize housing in vacant properties and underutilized commercial properties.

D. HILLSIDE FLEXIBILITY

Replace slope prohibitions with engineered solutions and form-based hillside standards.

E. SIMPLIFY REVIEW PROCESSES

- Create administrative approval for minor modifications and expand administrative approval parameters.

- Reserve HPC review for significant alterations to authentic historic properties.

F. INCREASE DENSITY TO PROMOTE WALKABILITY AND MITIGATE VEHICULAR DEPENDENCIES

Allow density tiers with historically successful walkable urban densities in Areas of Growth (see Chapter 6). Benefits include:

- Maximize limited available developable land with less
- Walkability & Accessibility: Higher densities make daily needs accessible within a 15-minute walk or bike ride.
- Support for Local Economy: More residents mean more foot traffic for local businesses, reducing car dependence.
- Efficient Services: Compact development lowers the cost of providing roads, sewers, and emergency services.
- Reduced Emissions: Less driving leads to lower greenhouse gas emissions and better air quality.
- Reduced resident traffic and parking appealing to visitors
- Vibrant streets appealing to visitors



G. DESIGN STRATEGIES:

- i. **MIXED-USE & VARIETY:** Combines housing types (apartments, townhomes, cottages) with retail/commercial spaces.
- ii. **HUMAN-SCALE BUILDINGS:** Focuses on mid-rise buildings (5-7 stories) rather than isolated towers.
- iii. **STRATEGIC PARKING:** Uses shared parking, parking garages on the edge, or off-street solutions to keep streets pedestrian-friendly.
- iv. **CONTEXT-SENSITIVE:** Adapts density to the local character of each village (see Chapter 6), allowing for lower densities in some areas while increasing it strategically where it adds the most benefit.
- v. **INCREASE DENSITY**
 - a. Medium Density Residential 1: 10-15 Units Per Acre (UPA) - Supports basic neighborhood services, frequent bus stops, and local shops (like bakeries) without relying on cars.
 - b. 15-25 UPA: Viable for light rail or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and more robust mixed-use centers.
 - c. High-Density Residential: 30-50+ upa: Ideal for creating lively, walkable main streets with a mix of housing (townhomes, small apartments) and shops, often using 5-7 story buildings.

5.2 DESIGN GUIDELINES REFORMS

A. REPLACE STYLISTIC REPLICATION WITH PERFORMANCE-BASED COMPATIBILITY

- i. Limit historic preservation requirements, methods, and techniques to authentic historic buildings.
- ii. Distinguish infill within the historic core from new construction outside of the historic core.
- iii. Allow flexibility for non-historic buildings. Shift from “match historic styles” to:
 - a. Compatible massing
 - b. Compatible scale and rhythm
 - c. High-quality but contemporary materials
 - d. Clear differentiation between old and new

B. ALLOW CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURAL

EXPRESSION

- i. Permit modern forms, window systems, roof types, and materials when they complement the historic setting.
- ii. Limit prohibition of modern materials to cases where visual conflict is likely or historic fabric is critical.

C. ALLOW FLEXIBLE SITE PLANNING

- i. Permit parcel consolidation where no historic resources are removed.
- ii. Allow contemporary circulation solutions for fire access, ADA needs, and steep terrain.

D. UPDATE PORCHES, DECKS, AND MATERIAL STANDARDS

- i. Permit contemporary porch interpretations.
- ii. Allow composite and durable materials.
- iii. Avoid mandatory cladding of new foundations in faux-historic materials.

E. ALIGN WITH THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS

- i. Ensure new construction is compatible but clearly distinguishable.
- ii. Avoid creating false historical narratives.
- iii. Emphasize preservation of authentic historic resources over replication of historic appearances.

6. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN POLICY DIRECTION

This Comprehensive Plan recommends the City adopt the following overarching policy statements:

-  **A. PRESERVE AUTHENTIC HISTORIC RESOURCES**
Prioritize protecting genuine historic buildings over reproducing historic styles in new construction.
-  **B. ENABLE COMPATIBLE CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT**
Encourage new buildings that respect scale and context while expressing the architectural language of their own time.
-  **C. PROMOTE YEAR-ROUND ECONOMIC VITALITY**
Use zoning and design standards to enable housing, hospitality, and mixed-use projects that support a balanced year-round economy.
-  **D. IMPROVE DEVELOPMENT PREDICTABILITY**
Update the LDC and Guidelines to reduce discretionary reviews, increase clarity, and streamline approvals.
-  **E. SUPPORT WORKFORCE HOUSING & LOCAL BUSINESSES**
Provide zoning and design flexibility to ensure new development can meet modern needs.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The City should implement code and guideline reforms through:

- A. A Unified Development Code (UDC) combining zoning, subdivision, and design standards
- B. A new *Infill & New Construction Design* chapter
- C. A Parking Management District for the Historic Core
- D. HPC training on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards
- E. Developer and community workshops to support culturally sustainable growth

8. POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR GROWTH, LAND USE, AND URBAN FORM




The City should implement code and guideline reforms through:

POLICY LU-1: Concentrate new development in defined village areas to reinforce historic character while accommodating large-scale growth.

POLICY LU-2: Support mixed-use, higher-intensity development outside the National Historic Landmark District where infrastructure capacity exists.

POLICY LU-3: Use form-based and performance standards to guide development outcomes rather than restrict land use.

STRATEGIES

-  **STRATEGY LU5.A** - Update Future Land Use Map to clearly distinguish preservation-priority areas from growth-priority areas.
-  **STRATEGY LU5.B** - Establish overlay districts for gaming-resort, mixed-use, and recreation-oriented development.
-  **STRATEGY LU5.C** - Allow flexible building envelopes tied to performance metrics (height transitions, massing, access, infrastructure).

CHAPTER 2 ENDNOTES & RESOURCES

[2.1] Statewide Tourism Industry Performance & Trends
Colorado Tourism Office. 2025. Colorado’s Strong Tourism Industry Continues to Grow. Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade. (Longwoods and Dean Runyan summaries and updates)

<https://oedit.colorado.gov/tourism-research>

[2.2] Gaming Share of Revenues

Gilpin County Budget Book. 2024.

<https://gilpinpublicdata.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/Finance/2024+Budget+Book.pdf>

[2.3] Gaming Industry Statistics

Colorado Division of Gaming, Department of Revenue, Specialized Business Group. Gaming Industry Statistics (FY 2024 statements; distribution formulas and trends). 2025.

<https://sbg.colorado.gov/industry-statistics-gaming>

[2.4] Gilpin County Labor Trends

Colorado Mesa University. 2024. Gilpin County Economic Update. Dr. Nathan Perry.

<https://www.coloradomesa.edu/business/documents/gilpin-county-economic-newsletter-feb-2024.pdf>

[2.5] Outdoor Recreation State Impact

Axios. 2024. Colorado outdoor recreation industry worth \$17.2B. John Frank.

<https://www.axios.com/local/denver/2024/11/20/colorado-outdoor-recreation-industry-17-billion-bea>

[2.6] American Planning Association (APA) Best Practices

<https://planning.org/research/economicdevelopment/>

CHAPTER 3

REVENUES, CORE SERVICES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

PAGE	SECTION
59	3.1 INTRODUCTION SUMMARY
60	3.2 REVENUE TRENDS AND CONTEXT
62	3.3 PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION
66	3.4 TRANSPORTATION & MULTI-MODAL MOBILITY
72	3.5 PUBLIC SAFETY
77	3.6 WATER, SEWER & STORMWATER
80	3.7 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE





Artist concept of large scale development bulding envelopes in Central City by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

3.1 INTRODUCTION SUMMARY

Central City will guide future large-scale development through a growth-resilient infrastructure framework that converts scale into strength rather than strain. As investment returns to the historic core and adjacent development areas, the City will ensure that infrastructure systems evolve in lockstep with redevelopment intensity, protecting public safety, historic resources, fiscal sustainability and community livability.

Large-scale development represents both the greatest opportunity and the greatest risk to Central City's long-term stability. Properly aligned, it can fund generational infrastructure renewal. Improperly sequenced, it can strain systems designed for a much smaller, seasonal population. This chapter establishes the policy framework to carefully manage and ensure growth strengthens, enhances, and preserves the City.

3.2 REVENUE TRENDS AND CONTEXT



Central City’s fiscal structure is distinctive and inherently exposed to volatility. Unlike most municipalities, the City depends heavily on visitor-based revenues—gaming, hospitality, tourism and sales taxes—rather than a broad residential tax base. This model enables a high level of service relative to the City’s permanent population, but also exposes municipal finances to sudden disruption from economic downturns, disasters and shifts in regional travel behavior.

At the same time, Central City faces extraordinary per-capita service and infrastructure costs. Steep grades increase construction and maintenance costs for streets and utilities. Winter weather accelerates deterioration of pavement and pipes. Historic systems require specialized maintenance. Emergency services must be scaled to protect not only residents, but also visitor volumes that can exceed the year-round population many times over.

These realities make it essential that short-term visitor revenue be continually converted into long-term civic assets, not consumed solely through annual operations.

The City can also leverage state and federal programs that support infrastructure and fiscal resilience, including housing and infrastructure resources through the [Colorado Department of Local Affairs](#) (DOLA) and the [Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade’s Proposition 123 affordable housing programs](#).

STRENGTHS

Central City’s visitor-driven revenue system is a powerful asset for capital formation. When gaming and tourism activity increase, the City experiences:

- Rapid growth in sales and use tax
- Strong excise and special assessment performance
- Scalable revenue without proportional population growth
- An unusually high ability to fund infrastructure

relative to permanent population

Large-scale redevelopment—particularly hospitality, entertainment and mixed-use destination projects—has the capacity to multiply this fiscal leverage, creating once-in-a-generation opportunities to eliminate deferred maintenance and modernize core systems.

CHALLENGES WITH LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT

However, this revenue structure also creates three significant risks under large development pressure:

1. Revenue volatility at higher stakes. As capital systems become more complex and expensive, sudden tourism downturns carry amplified fiscal consequences.
2. Service cost acceleration. Every major development increases public safety call volumes, snow removal demand, utility system stress, and traffic and parking enforcement faster than proportional revenue growth.
3. Over-reliance on a single economic sector. Large destination projects risk deepening dependency on gaming and tourism rather than diversifying it.

STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

Future development agreements must:

- Internalize infrastructure impacts through impact fees, system development charges and direct system participation (as guided by [DOLA best practices on fees and capital planning](#))
- Tie revenue windfalls to restricted capital reinvestment—not short-term operating expansion





REVENUE GOALS

GOAL 3-R.1 — Align Growth with Infrastructure Capacity and Fiscal Sustainability

Central City will ensure that all new development—particularly large-scale projects—funds, phases, and delivers infrastructure in direct proportion to its impacts, converting growth into long-term civic strength rather than system strain.

GOAL 3-R.2 — Diversify and Stabilize the City’s Revenue Base

Central City will reduce fiscal vulnerability by expanding non-gaming revenue sources and strengthening long-term, predictable funding streams.



STRATEGIES

3-R.A Establish a Growth-Linked Infrastructure Framework

Tie all major development approvals to verified infrastructure capacity, phasing, and funding commitments.

3-R.B Internalize the True Cost of Development

Ensure that development fully accounts for public safety, utilities, transportation, and long-term maintenance costs.

3-R.C Convert Revenue Volatility into Capital Stability

Direct episodic revenue gains into restricted capital reinvestment rather than expanding ongoing operating costs.

3-R.D Expand Non-Gaming Economic Activity
Leverage outdoor recreation, lodging, housing, and mixed-use development to broaden the tax base.

3-R.E Strengthen Property and Lodging-Based Revenues

Encourage development that increases assessed value and overnight stays.

3-R.F Align Incentives with Long-Term Fiscal Benefit

Ensure public incentives prioritize projects that generate durable, diversified revenues.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-R1.1. Adopt a comprehensive impact fee and system development charge update, aligned with Colorado DOLA guidance

3-R1.2. Require development agreements for all large-scale projects that include:

- Infrastructure phasing plans
- Capital cost participation
- Long-term maintenance commitments

3-R1.3. Establish a Capital Reinvestment Policy requiring a defined percentage of gaming/tourism windfalls to be allocated to infrastructure reserves

3-R1.4. Create a Growth Impact Analysis requirement for all major projects (utilities, fire flow, traffic, stormwater, staffing)

3-R1.5. Develop a multi-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP) directly tied to growth areas (Mountain City, Gregory Gulch, etc.)

3-R1.6. Evaluate and implement a lodging tax or adjustment strategy tied to tourism infrastructure funding

3-R1.7. Update land use and zoning to support:

- Mixed-use development
- Workforce and market-rate housing
- Non-gaming commercial uses

3-R1.8. Develop a fiscal impact model for evaluating major projects (short-term vs long-term revenue yield)

3-R1.9. Establish public-private partnership (P3) guidelines tied to measurable fiscal returns

3-R1.10. Pursue funding through Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA programs)



Artist Concept of trail and park improvements at William C. Russell Park by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

3.3 PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION

Parks, trails and outdoor recreation are no longer peripheral amenities in Central City—they are now a primary economic diversification strategy, public health system, climate adaptation tool and community identity framework. The adopted Central City Trails Master Plan (2020) established the City’s first comprehensive, long-range vision for trail-based recreation, identifying a 10- to 15-year horizon for implementation, funding alignment and system maintenance (Central City Trails Master Plan, 2020).

Unlike conventional communities with large flat park sites, Central City’s recreation system is distributed across steep terrain, historic corridors, rail beds, stair systems, reservoir lands and surrounding public lands. The City’s parks, reservoir lands, trail corridors and adjacent national forest together form a recreation network that supports residents while extending the visitor experience beyond gaming floors and commercial corridors.

Public engagement for the Trails Master Plan highlighted that residents value protection of natural resources, historic sites, economic vitality, connectivity and health. The plan aligns closely with funding sources such as [Great Outdoors Colorado’s open space and trails grants](#) and the [Colorado Tourism Office’s destination development programs](#).

STRENGTHS

Central City’s parks and trail system is uniquely positioned to absorb and distribute the impacts of large-scale visitation growth:

- Regional trail access disperses visitors beyond a single core
- Distributed parks reduce pressure on downtown streets
- Reservoir lands provide scalable event and recreation capacity
- Trail corridors support tourism without continuous vehicular circulation

Large-scale development near downtown can leverage this system to extend visitor stays, encourage non-gaming spending and improve resident quality of life.



Above: Artist Concepts of South Entry Plaza pedestrian bridge over Central City Parkway by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

Artist Concept of South Entry Plaza and Park by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

CHALLENGES UNDER LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT

With major new hospitality, residential or entertainment projects, the parks and trail system will face:

- Overcapacity risk at trailheads and reservoir access points
- Deferred maintenance escalation from higher foot traffic and year-round use
- Wildland–urban interface intensification along trail edges and ridge lines
- Stormwater load concentration at the interface between developed sites and open space
- Conflicts between tourist and resident use in high-demand locations

STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

In order for public spaces to improve for residents and visitors, future development must:

- Fund new trail segments, trailhead facilities and park expansion, using tools such as [GOCO grants](#) and local match from development.
- Contribute to wildfire buffers and vegetation management in partnership with the [Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control](#)
- Integrate stormwater detention and slope stabilization directly into park and trail infrastructure, coordinated with the City’s stormwater master planning and [DOLA guidance on resilient infrastructure](#)



PARKS & OUTDOOR RECREATION GOALS

GOAL 3-P.1 — BUILD A RESILIENT, RECREATION-BASED PARKS AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM

Central City will expand and modernize its parks, trails, and open space network as both critical infrastructure and a primary economic diversification strategy.



STRATEGIES

3-P.A SCALE THE TRAILS AND RECREATION SYSTEM WITH GROWTH

Ensure that recreation infrastructure expands in parallel with visitation and development intensity.

3-P.B INTEGRATE ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE INTO RECREATION SYSTEMS

Use parks and trails as tools for stormwater management, wildfire mitigation, and slope stabilization.

3-P.C LEVERAGE RECREATION TO EXTEND VISITOR STAY AND SPENDING

Position outdoor recreation as a core component of the visitor economy.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-P1.1. Implement priority projects from the Trails Master Plan, including:

- Trailhead expansions
- Connectivity improvements
- Wayfinding systems

3-P1.2. Require new development to:
Fund trail connections and park improvements
Provide public access easements where appropriate

3-P1.3. Pursue grants from Great Outdoors Colorado

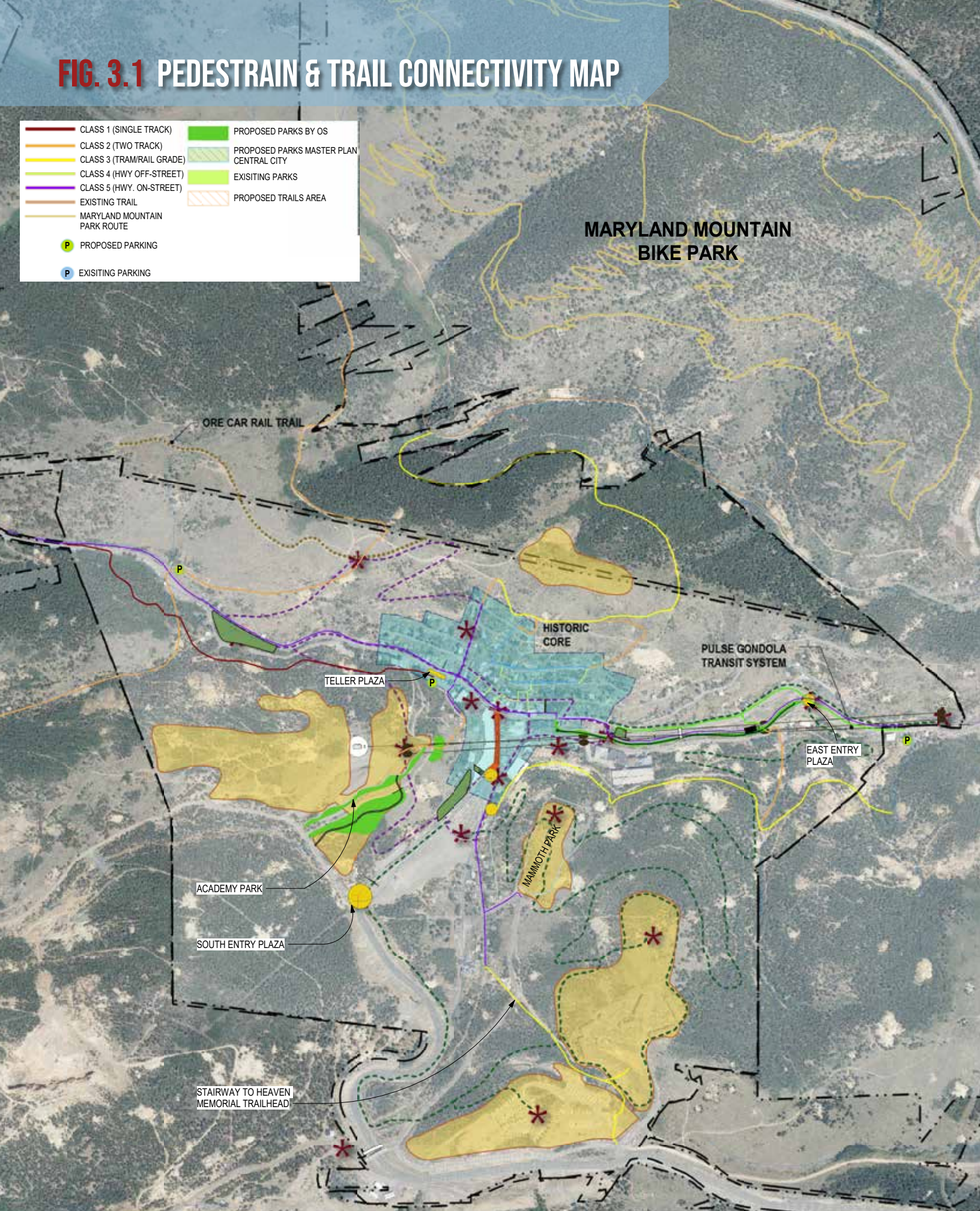
3-P1.4. Integrate stormwater detention and slope stabilization into park and trail design
Develop a Recreation Carrying Capacity Plan to manage peak visitation impacts

3-P1.5. Coordinate wildfire mitigation with the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control

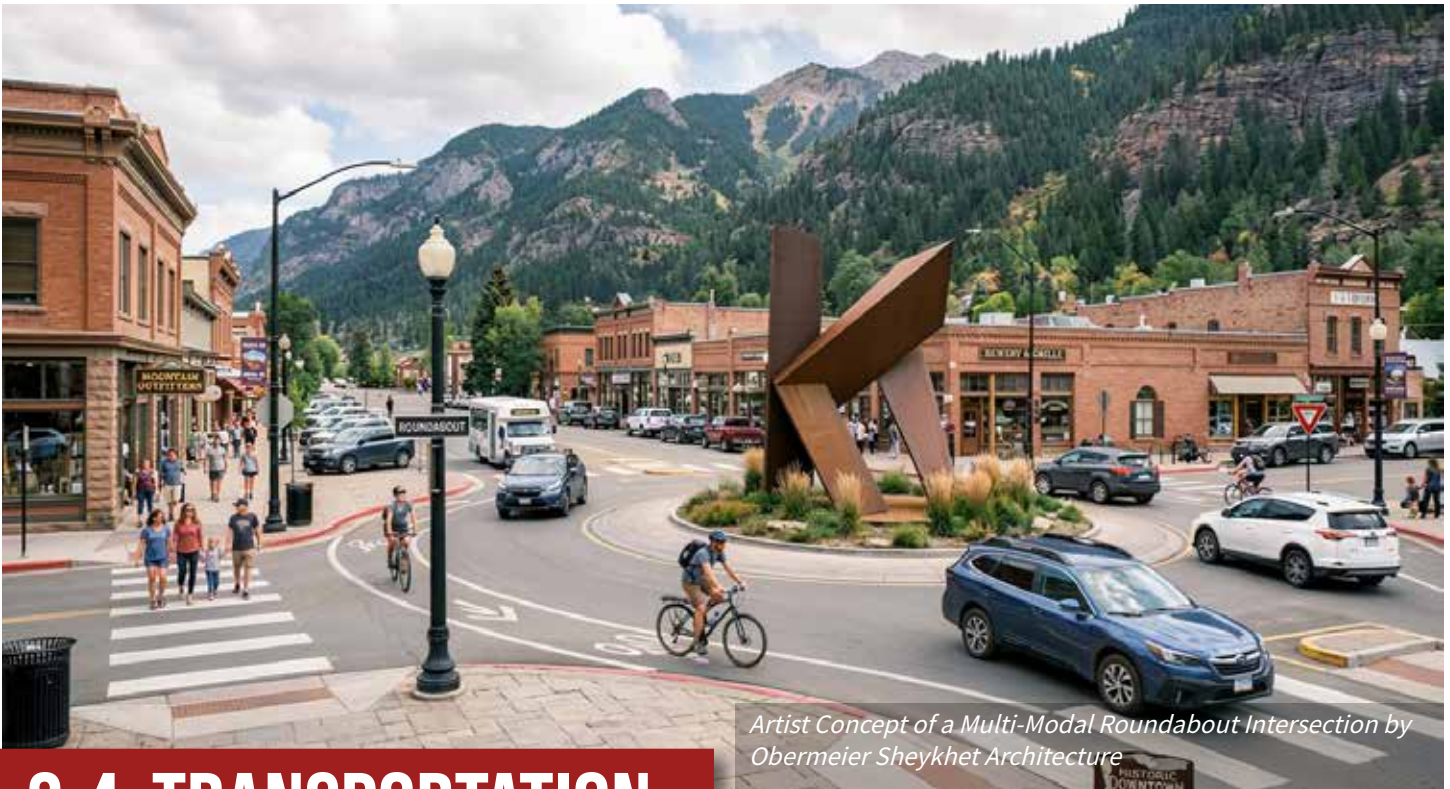


FIG. 3.1 PEDESTRAIN & TRAIL CONNECTIVITY MAP

- | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|---|
| | CLASS 1 (SINGLE TRACK) | | PROPOSED PARKS BY OS |
| | CLASS 2 (TWO TRACK) | | PROPOSED PARKS MASTER PLAN CENTRAL CITY |
| | CLASS 3 (TRAM/RAIL GRADE) | | EXISTING PARKS |
| | CLASS 4 (HWY OFF-STREET) | | PROPOSED TRAILS AREA |
| | CLASS 5 (HWY. ON-STREET) | | |
| | EXISTING TRAIL | | |
| | MARYLAND MOUNTAIN PARK ROUTE | | |
| | PROPOSED PARKING | | |
| | EXISTING PARKING | | |



MARYLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK



Artist Concept of a Multi-Modal Roundabout Intersection by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

3.4 TRANSPORTATION & MULTI-MODAL MOBILITY



Transportation in Central City is fundamentally defined by steep topography, narrow historic rights-of-way, intense seasonal visitation and emergency access constraints. The 2020 Trails Master Plan reaffirmed that pedestrians, stairways, informal paths, historic rail beds and limited sidewalk segments form the City’s true mobility network, not conventional arterial road systems.

Unlike conventional communities with continuous sidewalks and flat terrain, Central City operates with intense elevation change. A hybrid mobility system that blends streets, sidewalks, stairways, multi-use trails, rail corridors and distributed parking is necessary to encourage as much mobility as possible within the City and surrounding areas. Considering the city’s aging population, improving walkability and connectivity is a priority.

SIDEWALKS, STAIRWAYS & DOWNTOWN PEDESTRIAN SPINE

The Trails Master Plan found that much of the downtown core has sidewalks, but many are narrow, steeply cross-sloped or obstructed. Outside the core, sidewalks are generally absent. Stairways therefore function as primary pedestrian arterials, linking High Street to downtown, residential neighborhoods to employment, and parking areas to the historic district.

Converting the southern portion of Main Street to pedestrian only traffic will enhance the visitor experience and contribute to the creation of a large, central public plaza that anchors the visitor experience in historic downtown.



Right: Artist Concept of Pedestrian-Only Main Street by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

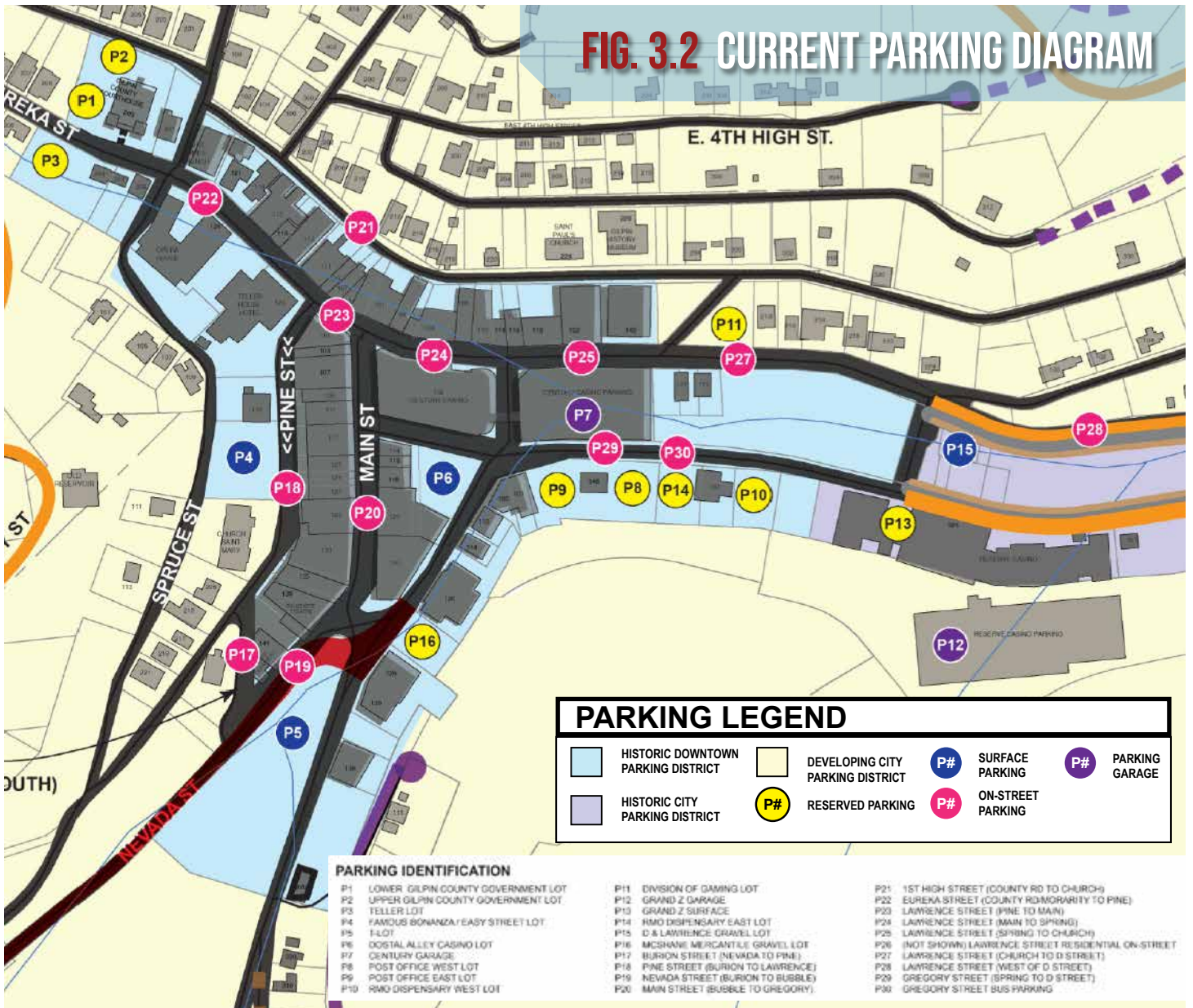


BICYCLE & TRAIL-BASED TRANSPORTATION

The Trails Master Plan also identified that there are no formal bicycle lanes within Central City and limited bicycle-specific infrastructure, but strong potential for recreational mountain biking and regional trail connectivity. This positions the City to use off-street trails as its primary form of bicycle and micro-mobility infrastructure. The recent emergence of ebikes as viable local transportation overcomes the challenge of steep grades that restricts most potential cyclists in warm months. Despite the current lack of bike lanes, new development and road improvements should make efforts to include them where possible.

Extending the emphasis of bike-oriented tourism opportunities (see chapter 2) to facilities and making bike parking available to residents shall reduce the local demand on street parking and ease vehicular traffic on the limited thoroughfares through downtown, and make sidewalks more pedestrian friendly.

As future growth is realized and traffic increases, the importance of non-vehicular travel and off-street connectivity will only increase.



Current Commercial & Public Parking Location Diagram

PARKING, TRAILS AND SHARED MOBILITY

In Central City, parking is often understood as a shortage. In practice, it is more accurately a problem of distribution, visibility, and competition. The number of available spaces, taken across the system as a whole, is frequently sufficient outside of peak conditions. What fails is not supply alone, but the alignment between where spaces exist, how they are accessed, and how users perceive their availability.

This distinction is critical. If the City responds to perception alone—by continuously expanding supply in the most constrained and valuable locations—it will erode historic character, consume limited land, and induce additional traffic without resolving the underlying problem. A system-level approach, by contrast, treats parking as one component of a broader mobility network that includes trails, stairways, and shared transportation.

Shared mobility provides a critical bridge between distributed parking and high-demand destinations. In a constrained mountain environment, it is often more efficient to move people than vehicles.

Key shared mobility components include:

- **Shuttle Systems** - Connecting remote parking areas, trailheads, and major destinations, particularly during peak periods
Employee Transportation Programs - Reducing long-duration parking demand in prime locations through remote parking and transit incentives
- **Event-Based Mobility Management** - Coordinating parking, shuttles, and pedestrian flows during large events or peak visitation periods
- **Micro-Mobility Integration** - Where feasible, incorporating e-bikes or similar systems for short-distance travel, particularly along trail corridors

These systems reduce pressure on the most constrained parts of the network while improving overall access.

The Role of Trails, Stairways, and Pedestrian Connections

Parking in Central City cannot be separated from its pedestrian network. Trails, stairways, and sidewalks are not supplemental amenities—they are the connective tissue that allows the parking system to function.

Short walking distances that would be trivial in a flat environment can feel significantly longer in steep terrain, particularly without:

Continuous and legible routes
Adequate lighting and winter maintenance
Clear wayfinding and grade transitions

When these elements are missing, even nearby parking becomes functionally “invisible” or undesirable.

Conversely, when connections are well designed:

Remote or elevated parking becomes viable and attractive
Visitor circulation disperses naturally, reducing congestion
The experience of moving through the City becomes part of the destination

Strategically investing in pedestrian infrastructure is therefore equivalent to expanding parking capacity—without adding a single new space.



Multi-modal commuter concept

INTEGRATED REGIONAL TRANSIT & DIRECT DENVER CONNECTIVITY

At present, Central City’s transit structure is largely tourism-oriented and limited in frequency. There is no fixed, scheduled commuter transit link to Denver, leaving the regional workforce largely dependent on private vehicles or company shuttles. Large-scale development fundamentally changes the viability threshold for daily regional transit service. With sufficient trip generation, Central City can support:

- Direct scheduled bus service in partnership with the Regional Transportation District (RTD; rtd-denver.com)
- Regional transit capital and operating support from the Colorado Department of Transportation’s transit and multimodal programs (codot.gov/programs/rfa)
- Federal support for major transit infrastructure through U.S. Department of Transportation RAISE grants (transportation.gov/grants/raise)

STRENGTHS

Central City’s compact form, stair systems, trail network and parkway access provide:

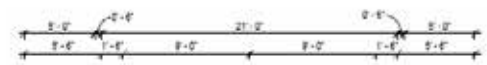
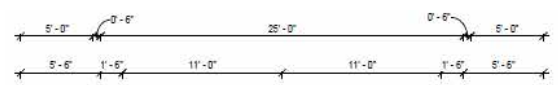
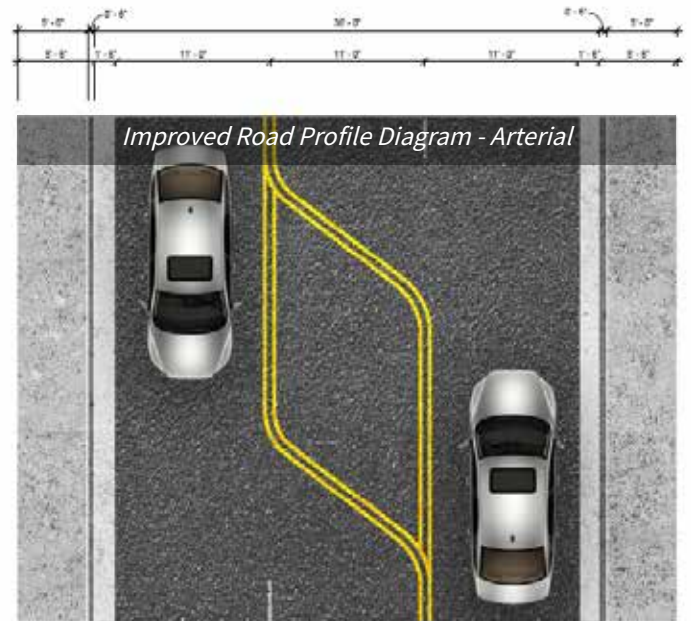
- Efficient internal circulation without long trip lengths
- Strong regional highway access
- Distributed pedestrian mobility potential
- Multiple shared parking opportunities

These conditions allow large-scale development to function with lower per-capita auto dependence than typical resort environments—if mobility systems are modernized in parallel.

GROWTH-DRIVEN CHALLENGES

Large developments will place immediate pressure on:

- Downtown traffic loading and curb management
- Visitor–employee parking competition
- Service and freight access conflicts
- Emergency vehicle turning radii
- Winter mobility and pedestrian safety
- Special-event crowd and shuttle management



STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

New large-scale developments should be required to:

- Contribute to transit capital and operations, potentially via local partnerships with RTD and CDOT
- Provide dedicated transit staging and loading zones
- Integrate employee transit benefits into project operations
- Coordinate shift scheduling with transit headways
- Fund downtown multimodal transfer hubs that connect trails, shuttles and regional buses, positioning projects to compete for CDOT and federal funding



TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY GOALS

GOAL 3-T.1 —ESTABLISH A SAFE, CONNECTED, MULTI-MODAL NETWORK ADAPTED TO CENTRAL CITY'S TOPOGRAPHY AND HISTORIC FORM

Central City will treat sidewalks, stairways, trails, parking connections, and shared mobility facilities as core transportation infrastructure necessary for growth, safety, and accessibility.

GOAL 3-T.2 —MANAGE PARKING, LOADING, AND CURB USE AS A DISTRICT-WIDE SYSTEM

Central City will shift from parcel-by-parcel parking decisions to coordinated district management that improves visitor access, supports businesses, protects emergency operations, and reduces unnecessary vehicle circulation.

GOAL 3-T.3 —EXPAND REGIONAL AND WORKFORCE ACCESS WITHOUT INCREASING UNSUSTAINABLE AUTO DEPENDENCE

Central City will improve transit, shuttle, and non-vehicular access so that future growth can occur without overwhelming historic streets and limited parking areas.



STRATEGIES

3-T.A PRIORITIZE STAIRWAYS, SIDEWALKS, TRAILS, AND ADA ROUTES AS PRIMARY MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Upgrade and connect the City's pedestrian network as an essential circulation system rather than a secondary amenity.

3-T.B IMPLEMENT A DOWNTOWN ACCESS, CURB, AND LOADING MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Coordinate deliveries, valet activity, shuttle operations, ride-hailing, accessible loading, and event closures through one downtown operations framework.

3-T.C ESTABLISH SHARED PARKING DISTRICTS AND EMPLOYEE PARKING STRATEGIES

Manage parking supply, wayfinding, pricing, and shared-use agreements at the district scale, with special attention to employee parking and peak-period demand.

3-T.E PRESERVE EMERGENCY ACCESS AND WINTER FUNCTIONALITY IN ALL STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Ensure that mobility projects maintain turning movements, snow operations, emergency response, and year-round reliability. Connect current dead end roads to existing or new roads where possible.

3-T.F EVALUATE PHASED PEDESTRIANIZATION OF SOUTH MAIN STREET

Use pilot closures, event operations, and design studies to determine how pedestrian-only or pedestrian-priority treatment can strengthen downtown while preserving emergency and service access.

3-T.G REQUIRE TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT FROM LARGE DEVELOPMENTS

Require major projects to reduce parking and circulation impacts through shuttles, employee transit incentives, remote parking, shared mobility, and coordinated operations.

3-S.G WIDEN AND CONNECT DEAD END RESIDENTIAL STREETS WHERE POSSIBLE





Artist concept of a roundabout intersection and public plaza at the south end of Main Street. Concept by Obermeier Sheykhet Architecture

3-S.H CONSTRUCT A LOCAL DOWNTOWN BYPASS ROAD WITH ACCESS TO SUPPLEMENTARY WATER STORAGE

3-S.A BUILD A REGIONAL TRANSIT CONNECTION TO DENVER

Establish viable, frequent transit service tied to employment and tourism demand.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-T1.1. Prepare and adopt a Citywide Pedestrian and Vertical Circulation Plan that maps:

- All stairways, sidewalks, informal paths, and trail connections
- ADA-compliant and non-compliant segments
- Critical gaps between neighborhoods, parking, and downtown

3-T1.2. Install a comprehensive wayfinding system linking:
 Parking → stairways → downtown destinations
 Trails → commercial core

3-T1.3. Conduct a comprehensive parking utilization study measuring peak vs. off-peak demand, employee vs. visitor usage, and seasonal variation

3-T1.4. Integrate bike and micro-mobility infrastructure at all hubs, including secure bike parking and E-bike charging where feasible

3-T1.5. Identify and develop multi-modal hub locations that integrate:

- Regional transit
- Local shuttles
- Trail access
- Parking facilities

3-T1.6. Partner with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the Regional Transportation District (RTD) to:

- Conduct a feasibility study for direct Denver–Central City service
- Identify funding and corridor improvements supporting transit

3-T1.7. Conduct a South Main Street Mobility and Operations Study evaluating traffic diversion impacts, emergency access, business and economic effects

3-T1.8. Require all major developments to submit a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan as part of approval. Establish minimum TDM performance standards, including reduction in peak vehicle trips and employee mode shift targets

3.5 PUBLIC SAFETY: HAZARDS, FIRE PROTECTION, LAW ENFORCEMENT & EMS

Public safety in Central City is shaped by an overlapping matrix of wildfire exposure, steep terrain, hazardous weather, historic construction, tourism surges and regional commuting flows. It is not a conventional municipal service—it is the operating framework that allows the City to exist at all.

In a high-altitude environment defined by steep terrain, severe weather, dense historic construction, and highly variable visitor populations, risk is constant, layered, and often compounding. The same conditions that make Central City distinctive also elevate its exposure: narrow streets restrict access, historic wood-frame structures accelerate fire spread, and seasonal tourism surges place peak demand on systems during periods of greatest environmental vulnerability.

As the City anticipates renewed large-scale development, public safety systems must transition from reactive capacity to anticipatory design. Fire protection, law enforcement, and EMS must be scaled not to average daily population, but to peak conditions—when visitation, weather risk, and operational complexity converge. The central challenge is not simply service provision, but system resilience: ensuring that emergency response remains effective under the most demanding and least predictable conditions.

RISK PROFILE AND HAZARD ENVIRONMENT

Central City operates within a multi-hazard landscape where individual risks rarely occur in isolation. Instead, hazards tend to reinforce one another, producing cascading impacts that strain response systems.

PRIMARY HAZARD CONDITIONS

- **Wildland–Urban Interface (WUI):**
The City is fully embedded within a high-risk WUI environment. Dense vegetation, steep slopes, and prevailing wind patterns create conditions where small ignition events can escalate rapidly into structure-threatening fires.

- **Historic Structural Vulnerability:**
Many buildings predate modern fire codes, with wood-frame construction, limited separation distances, and concealed voids that allow fire to spread undetected.
- **Topographic Constraints:**
Steep grades, tight turning radii, and constrained rights-of-way limit apparatus access, staging, and evacuation efficiency.
- **Severe Weather and Climate Exposure:**
Heavy snowfall, freeze–thaw cycles, and increasingly intense storm events degrade infrastructure, impede response times, and elevate accident risk.
- **Visitor Population Surges:**
Peak visitation—often coinciding with weekends, events, or favorable weather—can multiply the effective population several times over, increasing demand for emergency services without a proportional increase in staffing.

COMPOUNDING RISK DYNAMICS

These hazards rarely act independently. A winter storm can delay response to a structure fire. A wildfire event can coincide with peak tourism, complicating evacuation. A medical emergency in a remote or steep location can require technical rescue under severe weather conditions. This compounding effect defines the operational reality of public safety in Central City.



Central City Fire Department Training 2025. Photo courtesy of Central City Fire Department.



Central City Fire Fighters Battle Historic Building Fire 2025.
(Photo courtesy of CCFD)

FIRE PROTECTION

Fire protection is the most critical life-safety function, given the prevalence of wood-frame historic buildings, narrow access routes and limited separation between structures.

The City’s fire department functions as an all-hazards response system, responsible for structural and wildland fire, medical response, vehicle extrication, hazardous materials and technical rescue. Tourism-driven population surges compound call volumes precisely during periods of peak wildfire and weather risk.

The City has access to state and federal mitigation and equipment funding through programs such as the [Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program](#), [Colorado wildfire grants](#), and the [federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant program](#).

Increased population from new development will likewise increase demand on emergency services. Investment in infrastructure, facilities, and equipment will be necessary to maintain public safety. Due to limited resources, fire departments from nearby municipalities currently support each other. As population and visitation grows, capacity and coordination must also expand.

EXISTING STRENGTHS

- Established mutual-aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions, including Black Hawk and regional fire districts
- Experience operating in high visitor-to-resident environments
- Operational familiarity with both structural and wildland fire conditions

CRITICAL SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS

- Limited apparatus access in historic areas due to narrow streets and tight geometry
- Insufficient fire flow and water storage in certain pressure zones, particularly for large structures
- Vertical development challenges, where multi-story buildings require higher pressure and extended ladder access
- Aging hydrant and distribution systems that may not meet modern fire suppression demands

GROWTH-DRIVEN RISK

Large-scale development—particularly hotels, gaming resorts, and multi-family buildings—introduces exponential increases in fire load, complexity, and consequence. Fire-flow requirements increase dramatically with building size and height, while evacuation becomes more complex and time-sensitive.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Future development must be treated as a direct driver of fire system investment. This includes:
 - Expansion of water storage and pressure systems to meet fire-flow requirements
 - Acquisition of specialized apparatus suited for steep terrain and vertical response
 - Development of secondary access and emergency egress routes
 - Enforcement of enhanced WUI construction standards, including ignition-resistant materials and defensible space

Funding opportunities through Federal Emergency Management Agency (BRIC and Assistance to Firefighters Grants) and the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control provide critical pathways to support these upgrades.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Policing and law enforcement is currently provided through the Gilpin County Sheriff's office. As the city grows and law enforcement becomes a full-service municipality, Law enforcement in Central City must operate at the intersection of a small residential community and a high-intensity visitor economy. The presence of gaming, tourism, and special events introduces a level of activity and behavioral variability uncommon for a city of its size.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Visitor populations fluctuate significantly by time of day, week, and season

Alcohol service, entertainment venues, and special events increase demand for policing services

Regional commuting patterns bring non-resident workers and visitors into the City daily

CORE FUNCTIONS

- Patrol and response within both residential and commercial areas
- Event management and crowd control
- Traffic enforcement and parking management
- Coordination with gaming security and private operators

GROWTH-DRIVEN CHALLENGES

- Increased demand for event policing and crowd management
- Greater need for traffic and curbside management, particularly during peak periods
- Expanded enforcement requirements related to parking, loading, and pedestrian safety
- Potential strain on staffing during simultaneous events or peak visitation periods

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Integrate law enforcement planning into development approvals, including event space and large venue operations
- Require major developments to provide private security coordination and funding support

- Expand real-time monitoring and communication systems, including camera networks and integrated dispatch
- Enhance regional coordination with adjacent jurisdictions and state agencies



Water Rescue Training 2026. Photo courtesy of Central City Fire Department.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES (EMS)

EMS in Central City must respond to a wide range of incidents, from routine medical calls to high-acuity emergencies associated with tourism, altitude, and environmental exposure. The aging population increases will put additional demands on EMS. Without concurrent improvement and expansion of facilities, equipment, personnel, and training, large-scale developments will be at an increased risk.

OPERATIONAL REALITIES

- Elevated risk of cardiovascular and respiratory events due to altitude
- Increased incidence of falls, injuries, and exposure-related conditions in steep and outdoor environments
- Variable call volumes tied to tourism and seasonal activity

SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS

- Response times affected by weather, road conditions, and topography
- Limited staging and access points in dense historic areas
Need for coordination with regional hospitals, often located at lower elevations

GROWTH-DRIVEN CHALLENGES

- Increases in call volume and service demand
- Require on-site medical response planning for large venues and events
- Introduce more complex incident scenarios, including multi-patient events

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

- Require large developments to include on-site EMS support capabilities during peak operations
- Expand training and equipment for technical rescue and high-angle response
- Improve dispatch coordination and communication systems
- Explore regional EMS partnerships to enhance coverage and redundancy

STRENGTHS

Central City's public safety system benefits from:

- Established mutual-aid agreements with regional partners
- Experience managing high visitor-to-resident ratios
- An all-hazards approach to fire, rescue, and EMS

LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT RISK

New projects will drive:

- Higher fire load density and structure-to-structure exposure
- Increased medical call volume
- More complex evacuations and sheltering needs

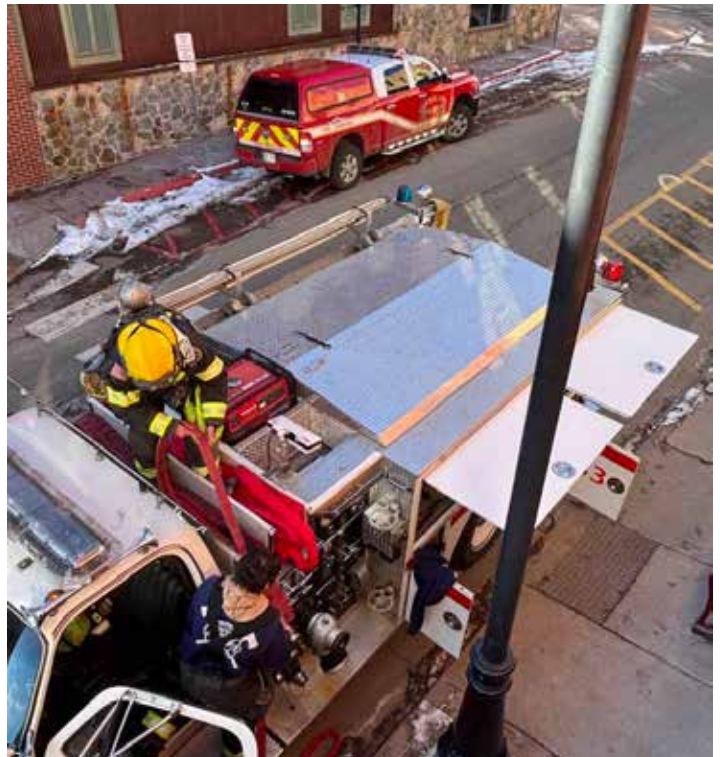
- Higher technical rescue demand
- Increased special-event policing

STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

The central principle is direct and non-negotiable: growth must fund safety.

All large-scale development must:

- Fully fund fire protection upgrades, including apparatus, staffing, and water systems
- Provide secondary emergency access and evacuation routes
- Meet or exceed WUI and fire-resistive construction standards
Contribute to law enforcement and EMS capacity expansion
- Integrate on-site emergency planning, staging, and coordination systems
- Participate in regional emergency communications upgrades, including those supported by [homeland security grants](#).



CCFD Responding to a call in 2026. Photo courtesy of Central City Fire Department.



PUBLIC SAFETY GOALS

GOAL 3-S.1 — PROVIDE FIRE, EMS, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND EVACUATION SYSTEMS FOR PEAK CONDITIONS

Central City will scale public safety systems to the most demanding operating conditions, including peak visitation, wildfire threat, severe weather, and complex multi-agency incidents.

GOAL 3-S.2 — EXPAND AND MODERNIZE PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEMS FOR A HIGH-INTENSITY ENVIRONMENT

Central City will ensure that fire, EMS, and law enforcement systems scale proactively with development and environmental risk.



STRATEGIES

3-S.A PLAN SERVICE CAPACITY AROUND PEAK LOAD, NOT AVERAGE POPULATION

Align staffing, apparatus, facilities, and mutual-aid expectations with peak visitor volumes, high-risk conditions, and projected increases in population and visitation.

3-S.B STRENGTHEN WILDFIRE AND ALL-HAZARDS PREPAREDNESS

Address the compounded risks of wildfire, terrain, and historic structures.

3-S.C REQUIRE DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE

Ensure new projects directly contribute to system capacity.

3-S.D WIDEN AND CONNECT DEAD END RESIDENTIAL STREETS WHERE POSSIBLE

Provide sidewalks, ensure emergency vehicle turn radius at dead ends, and connect local streets.

3-S.E CONSTRUCT A LOCAL DOWNTOWN BYPASS ROAD WITH ACCESS TO SUPPLEMENTARY WATER STORAGE

3-S.F IMPROVE INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS, MONITORING, AND INCIDENT COORDINATION

Expand dispatch coordination, camera and communications systems, and private-public operational integration for events and emergency incidents.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-S1.1. Strengthen Historic Core and WUI hardening.

- Use ignition-resistant materials, defensible space, fire separation, access improvements, and retrofit priorities to reduce catastrophic loss potential.

3-S1.2. Require secondary access, egress, and site-specific emergency operations for large projects to ensure that major developments provide emergency access, evacuation options, staging, water supply, and operational coordination.

3-S1.3. Prepare area-specific evacuation, sheltering, and crowd management plans for the Historic Core, gaming districts, trail systems, and major event venues.

3-S1.4. Expand facilities, personnel, and equipment to meet increasing demand

3-S1.5. Utilize on-site satellite emergency services facilities for large-scale developments to ensure response time

3-S1.6. Construct roundabouts to control speed, improve pedestrian and multi-modal safety, and avoid sliding collisions during winter months.





System upgrades needed to combat tailings runoff challenges

3.6 WATER, SEWER & STORMWATER

Water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure form the invisible backbone of all development, historic preservation, housing and emergency response in Central City. While treatment capacity exists at the plant and district levels, distribution, pressure, storage and drainage performance define the true functional ceiling for growth.

Wastewater service is provided regionally through the [Black Hawk/Central City Sanitation District](#), which has invested in modernized treatment processes, expanded capacity and improved environmental performance. These upgrades mean that wastewater treatment is not a limiting factor for future housing, preservation or economic growth. The primary vulnerabilities instead lie in local collection pipes, pump stations and inflow and infiltration.

Stormwater is one of Central City's most complex and risk-laden infrastructure systems. Steep slopes, historic drainage patterns, climate-driven increases in storm intensity and freeze-thaw cycles combine to accelerate pavement failure, slope instability and localized flooding. Recognizing this, Central City is updating its Stormwater Master Plan to reflect current climate conditions, reassess

capacity constraints, prioritize high-consequence projects and integrate green infrastructure. [DOLA provides technical guidance and potential funding support](#) for stormwater and resiliency planning.

Water and wastewater projects may be eligible for low-interest financing through the state revolving fund programs administered in partnership with [DOLA and the Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority](#).

STRENGTHS

- Adequate water and wastewater treatment capacity at the plant and district levels
- Regional sanitation infrastructure with surplus capacity
- An active, climate-informed stormwater planning effort underway

CRITICAL GROWTH CONSTRAINTS

Large-scale development introduces system pressures that do not exist under gradual infill:

- Fire-flow volume requirements multiply exponentially with building height and massing
- Pump and pressure zone limits are reached quickly
- Water storage reserves become critical path constraints
- Stormwater peak flows increase disproportionately, stressing channels and culverts
- Historic foundations become more vulnerable to changes in runoff patterns
- Slope stability thresholds can be exceeded under altered drainage

STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

Large developments must:

- Fully fund distribution upgrades, pump stations and fire storage improvements
- Internalize peak stormwater detention and controlled release
- Coordinate stormwater discharge timing with downstream channels and capacity
- Protect historic buildings from altered runoff regimes through integrated drainage design



An oak drain pipe in use illustrates the need to modernize infrastructure



WATER, SEWER, AND STORMWATER GOALS

GOAL 3-W.1 — ENSURE WATER, WASTEWATER, AND STORMWATER SYSTEMS ENABLE (NOT LIMIT) GROWTH

Central City will modernize its utility systems to support development while protecting historic resources and environmental stability.

GOAL 3-W.2 — MANAGE WATER, DRAINAGE, AND SLOPE STABILITY AT THE WATERSHED SCALE

Central City will plan water, wastewater, and stormwater systems as interconnected hillside and drainage systems rather than isolated utility components.

GOAL 3-W.3 — BUILD REDUNDANCY, ASSET KNOWLEDGE, AND LIFECYCLE RELIABILITY INTO UTILITY SYSTEMS

Central City will strengthen utility reliability through system mapping, replacement planning, fire-flow protection, and coordinated capital investment.



STRATEGIES

3-W.A PRIORITIZE DISTRIBUTION, STORAGE, AND PRESSURE IMPROVEMENTS

Address the true system constraints beyond treatment capacity.

3-W.B INTEGRATE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT WITH URBAN DESIGN

Shift from reactive drainage to proactive, system-wide water management.

3-W.C PROTECT HISTORIC STRUCTURES FROM INFRASTRUCTURE IMPACTS

Ensure that infrastructure upgrades reduce—not increase—risk to historic assets.

3-W.D COORDINATE UPSTREAM AND DOWNSTREAM DRAINAGE PERFORMANCE

Manage detention, controlled release, culverts, channels, and discharge timing as one integrated system.

3-W.E REQUIRE DRAINAGE AND UTILITY DESIGN THAT PROTECTS HISTORIC STRUCTURES AND STEEP SLOPES

Ensure that new development and public improvements reduce runoff impacts, slope instability, and foundation risk.





Mine tailings runoff before and after reclamation efforts. (Photo courtesy of National Parks Service)

3-W.F PRIORITIZE SYSTEM MAPPING, CONDITION ASSESSMENT, AND REPLACEMENT SEQUENCING

Use asset data to identify critical weaknesses in pipes, pressure zones, pump systems, culverts, and related facilities.

3-W.G RESERVE FIRE-FLOW, STORAGE, AND PRESSURE CAPACITY BEFORE MAJOR OCCUPANCY OCCURS

Tie development phasing and occupancy to demonstrated availability of fire suppression and utility capacity.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-W1.1. Coordinate with the Black Hawk/Central City Sanitation District on capacity and system planning

3-W1.2. Require developments to fully fund distribution upgrades and provide on-site stormwater detention and controlled release

3-W1.3. Implement priority projects from the Stormwater Master Plan

3-W1.4. Pursue financing through Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority

3-W1.5. Develop a citywide drainage and slope stabilization program

3-W1.6. Map and prioritize high-risk historic structures for drainage protection

3-W1.7. Adopt a Citywide Integrated Drainage and Utility Model

- Develop a basin-level hydraulic model that establishes allowable release rates, identifies downstream constraints (culverts, channels, inlets), and requires all development to match controlled discharge timing to system capacity.

3-W1.8. Require Project-Level Drainage, Slope Stability, and Historic Protection Analysis

- Mandate that all development and public improvements demonstrate no increase in runoff impacts to steep slopes or historic structures, including engineered solutions for detention, dispersion, erosion control, and foundation protection.

3-W1.9. Establish Enforceable Release Rate and No-Net-Impact Standards

- Implement code requirements that limit post-development peak flows to pre-development conditions (or lower), prohibit concentrated discharge onto vulnerable areas, and require on-site detention sized to cumulative basin conditions.

3-W1.10. Build a GIS-Based Asset Inventory and Risk-Prioritized Capital Program

- Map and assess all water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure (pipes, pressure zones, culverts, pump systems), and use this data to sequence replacement and upgrades based on failure risk, downstream consequence, and growth area demand.

3-W1.11. Tie Development Approval and Occupancy to Verified System Capacity

- Require fire-flow, storage, pressure, and conveyance capacity to be fully demonstrated—and, where necessary, constructed—before building permits or certificates of occupancy are issued.

3-W1.12. Require Development to Fund System Upgrades and Participate in Phased Infrastructure Delivery

- Use development agreements to ensure projects contribute to distribution upgrades, storage expansion, stormwater infrastructure, and system redundancy, with occupancy phased to match infrastructure delivery milestones.



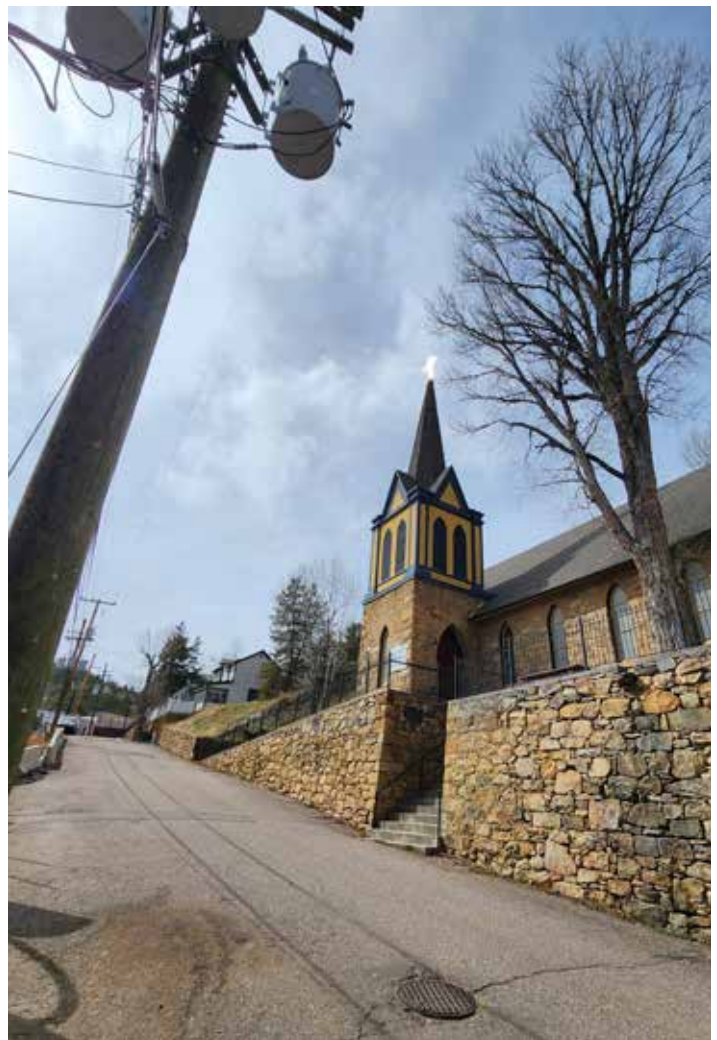
Contaminated stormwater runoff in Gregory Gulch 2023.

3.7 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

Telecommunications infrastructure now functions as critical economic, safety and housing infrastructure, equivalent in importance to water and roads. High-speed broadband access shapes Central City’s ability to attract remote workers, support modern small businesses, operate municipal systems and coordinate emergency response.

In a historic environment dominated by adaptive reuse, broadband must be retrofitted sensitively but comprehensively. Connectivity directly influences the feasibility of workforce housing, mixed-use rehabilitation, tourism technology platforms and municipal operations. It also defines whether younger households and entrepreneurs can realistically remain in the community.

Redundant communications infrastructure is also essential for disaster response. Wildfire, extreme weather and power outages expose the vulnerabilities of single-path systems. Federal broadband and resilience initiatives, including [NTIA’s BroadbandUSA](#) and emergency communications [grants administered through the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#), provide potential support for local projects.



Overhead power and data lines along E. 1st High Street

STRENGTHS

- State-level broadband barriers have been removed
- Fiber expansion is now legally and financially viable
- Strong demand from residents, employers and visitors for high-quality connectivity

DEVELOPMENT-DRIVEN RISK

Large-scale development increases:

- Load on emergency communication networks
- Demand for redundant broadband paths
- Dependence on uninterrupted digital operations
- Exposure to wildfire and power-disruption failures

STRATEGIC GROWTH IMPLICATIONS

In order to reduce system strain, new developments must:

- Include redundant broadband pathways and equipment space
- Provide shared emergency telecommunications infrastructure accessible to public safety agencies
- Support regional fiber backbone investment, in partnership with state and federal broadband efforts

CONCLUSION: GROWTH AS MULTIPLIER, GROWTH AS RISK

New large-scale development in Central City is not simply a land-use question—it is a systems question. Growth will multiply:

- Revenue
- Regional exposure
- Infrastructure load
- Emergency risk
- Climate vulnerability

With the return of large-scale development, this relationship intensifies. Rather than strain the system, thoughtful and effective growth strategies and policies will fund the generational repair and modernization of these systems.



TELECOMMUNICATION GOALS

GOAL 3-T.1 — ESTABLISH HIGH-CAPACITY, REDUNDANT DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY AS CORE CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Central City will provide telecommunications systems that support public safety, municipal operations, business competitiveness, housing, and remote work.

GOAL 3-C.2 — INTEGRATE TELECOMMUNICATIONS RESILIENCE INTO ALL MAJOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Central City will coordinate fiber, wireless, conduit, backup power, and emergency communications investments so that digital systems remain functional during growth, wildfire, severe weather, and power disruption.



STRATEGIES

3-C.A EXPAND FIBER BACKBONE AND LAST-MILE BROADBAND CITYWIDE

Support reliable, high-speed connectivity for neighborhoods, business districts, civic facilities, and growth areas.

3-C.B REQUIRE REDUNDANT PATHWAYS, EQUIPMENT SPACE, AND BACKUP POWER FOR MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Reduce single-point failure risk for private and public communications systems.

3-C.C COORDINATE TELECOMMUNICATIONS WITH STREET, UTILITY, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

Adopt a conduit-first and dig-once approach wherever feasible to lower costs and improve long-term network expansion.

3-C.D IMPROVE CELLULAR, RADIO, AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS COVERAGE

Address coverage gaps that affect emergency response, visitor safety, and municipal operations.

3-C.E DEPLOY TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE IN A MANNER COMPATIBLE WITH HISTORIC CHARACTER

Use undergrounding, shared facilities, concealment, and coordinated design where feasible in sensitive historic areas.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

3-C1.A. Partner with federal programs such as NTIA BroadbandUSA

3-C1.B. Require new developments to:

- Provide redundant fiber pathways
- Include shared telecom infrastructure for emergency services

3-C1.C. Develop a Citywide Broadband Expansion Plan

3-C1.D. Integrate telecommunications upgrades into all major infrastructure projects

3-C1.E. Pursue funding through federal and homeland security grants

3-C1.F. Develop and adopt a Citywide Broadband and Fiber Master Plan

- Map existing backbone and last-mile gaps; define priority corridors (downtown, neighborhoods, growth areas); and establish a phased expansion program with public-private partnership pathways.

3-C1.G. Implement a “Dig Once / Conduit-First” Policy Across All Capital Projects

- Require installation of spare conduit and handholes with every street, utility, and drainage project; standardize conduit sizes, spacing, and access points for future fiber deployment.

3-C1.H. Require Redundant Fiber Pathways, Equipment Space, and Backup Power in Major Developments

- Mandate dual-path connectivity, dedicated telecom rooms, and emergency backup power for large projects, with provisions for shared access by public safety where appropriate.

3-C1.I. Create a Public-Private Partnership Framework for Last-Mile Deployment

- Use development agreements, easements, and

cost-sharing to extend service into underserved areas, leveraging state and federal funding programs to close coverage gaps.

3-C1.J. Conduct a Comprehensive Wireless and Emergency Communications Coverage Assessment

- Identify gaps in cellular, radio, and emergency communications; prioritize improvements for wildfire response areas, downtown, and major visitor corridors.

3-C1.K. Deploy Targeted Small-Cell, DAS, and Public Safety Radio Enhancements

- Install distributed antenna systems (DAS), small cells, and repeater infrastructure in identified gaps, coordinated with emergency services and regional communications systems.

3-C1.L. Adopt Historic-Compatible Telecommunications Design Standards

- Require undergrounding where feasible; use shared infrastructure, concealment techniques, and context-sensitive design to minimize visual impacts within historic districts.

3-C1.M. Integrate Telecommunications Infrastructure into Development Review and Capital Planning

- Require telecom plans with all major development applications and coordinate upgrades with CIP projects to ensure long-term network scalability and resilience.



Overhead power and data lines distract from historic district setting





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