

Section 1: Precedence for large-scale homeless housing

Unfortunately, in previous years, Denver's homeless housing programs have been relatively decentralized and ultimately lacking. According to information from the Denver Voice, from 2015 to 2018, while the sheltered homeless population has been steadily decreasing, the unsheltered population has been increasing. The Denver Post also reports that over the past 5 years, 2016 – 2020, Denver's homeless population has increased by 15%. According to a study of homelessness in American metropolitan areas, the Bay Area Council Economic Council in 2017 determined that Denver had similar proportions of permanently housed homeless individuals as New York City and San Diego who have been suffering with their own homelessness issues. Many programs that already exist to help homeless individuals and families get into permanent housing simply do not have the resources or reach needed to help everyone that needs it. A homeless housing project on the scale that I am proposing has not, to my knowledge, ever been attempted in any American city. My proposal is to utilize the rampant gentrification and development that has hit the Denver metro area in recent years to create new, affordable, and sustainable homes for those that are homeless.

I plan to accomplish this by designing a kind of multi-class community-based housing complex that would fit well visually and structurally to the kinds of heavily gentrified developments already happening in Denver. It is my belief that providing developers with an alternative to gentrification tactics that tend to be an alternative banking system, that instead provides community space and future economic development, could be hugely beneficial for the city, the people, and the developers in the long run.

Section 2: Government involvement in housing of homeless populations

The City and County of Denver's recent homeless initiatives have not sustained their promises, and as such, there are still mand hundreds of people that are homeless in the Denver metropolitan area. Even though the council of the City of Denver announces new homeless initiatives on a regular basis, many of them do not provide required levels of assistance, and all too often the City of Denver resorts to the sweeping of homeless populations from location-to-location, citing health and safety reasons, especially during the pandemic, even if these reasons are not well founded. The funding that the City of Denver uses to sweep homeless populations from place to place all over the city could be better used providing real estate developers with better and easier opportunities to develop affordable housing.

Section 3: Gentrification through real-estate development in Denver

Denver as a city has been suffering from rampant gentrification over the past few years, becoming the 2nd most gentrified city in the United States as of May 2020. The attraction and creation of higher-income workers, rising home values due to factors such as investments by the cannabis industry, new and affluent families moving in, and a growing population of graduates of higher education is causing more parts of Denver to economically grow too fast and carelessly to accommodate the long-term residents. With up to 27% of Denver neighborhoods having been gentrified in the last 8 years, many people who were not able to afford the new housing were either shifted to parts of town with less accessible services, such as public transit, while others simple lost their homes.

The desires of real estate companies that continue to rapidly develop the city and metro areas around Denver have not been supportive of the already existing needs of their communities. The culture

of the city itself has begun to shift more towards the new glass, steel, and brick buildings that line major roadways. Historically lower-middle income neighborhoods, such as those in Five Points or South Broadway are being transformed into very culturally and physically sterile places, as old buildings are bought out, changed, torn down, or renovated into new similarly designed housing structures. These neighborhoods tend to be largely Black or Hispanic, and as such the cultural identity of Denver is shifting away from a more diverse, heterogeneous group of people, to being more representative of affluent, white families.

Section 4: Design of community-centered multi-class housing that conforms to Denver development.

The core design of these new multi-class apartments is centered around community spaces and places where people of all socio-economic status can feel comfortable interacting with their neighbors. In consideration of this, I propose 3 main foci of design: A large, central courtyard area, for gathering, meeting, and socializing, surrounded by storefront space for shops and services; Lobby areas throughout the building based around being gathering spaces; Relatively open-designed units to encourage the intermingling of residents.

The large central courtyard area would be designed with community in mind first. Spaces for casual gathering and for children to play would be integral to the courtyard area, along with open walkways to allow easy movement between parts of the building and outside of the complex. Storefronts would be available for lease on the courtyard, however some would be reserved for services that may be required by the residents, such as family planning, career services, financial services, etc. Others would be open to traditional businesses. Not only does this plan take into consideration the needs of those living in the complex, but also mimics the spirit of Denver development in places such as the 16th Street Mall, providing open-air gathering spaces.

A lobby with open space and places to take a break can be a great place for people to casually mingle as they move between day-to-day tasks. Many lobbies I have seen, including some hotel and apartment lobbies, tend to be cramped or deliberately designed to deter congregation. I think this is ultimately detrimental to the feeling welcoming and relaxing. For this project, I propose an open lobby with seating and social space readily available, where people can feel comfortable and even eager congregating in.

Finally, the most obscure and perhaps radical idea of the three: making more open-style housing for the units. In this I do not mean that walls should be see-through, or that people should be forcibly made to interact with their neighbors, but rather trying to bring the feeling of a neighborhood street indoors. Giving hallways less of a claustrophobic “endless hall of doors” feeling, bringing in more natural light through mirrored skylights such as solar tubes, and providing small porch-like areas in front of home units to help encourage this style of community.

Section 5: Possible incentives for the construction of multi-class housing and surrounding development.

While the concepts explained in Section 4 could be effective, ultimately there needs to be reasons for the city and real estate developers to want to create such housing. Even if this project is based on an idea of giving other members of the community a better chance to be active parts of the

city, developers are private businesses that work for profit, and the City of Denver has dozens of concerns at any given moment. Providing real estate developers with proven incentives to encourage building these kinds of complexes, as well as integrating them into other projects that are important to the City of Denver is integral to these projects seeing the light of day rather than just being an interesting idea.

There are already several proven incentives for affordable real estate development that have already been implemented in places such as San Mateo County and the city of Boston. These include options such as Density bonuses, expedited permissions for construction, fee waivers or reductions, and special zoning permissions. Many inclusionary or affordable housing incentives that already exist allow developers to build denser and more profitable housing if they include a certain percentage of affordable housing units. As it applies to this project, I believe the allowance of a certain amount of extra units to increase density would be a reasonable incentive to give, however, an extra incentive of special developmental zones adjacent to the proposed complexes would be a powerful incentive as well. This secondary incentive would encourage developers to not only construct the projected complexes, but to also develop the economies in the surrounding neighborhoods.

With regards to the City of Denver, there are already 130 advisory boards and commissions that exist in the City of Denver's administration. Rolling these projects into existing boards or local commissions would help cut down on any extra bureaucracy the city already needs to handle, as well as allowing localized commissions more oversight on the construction and development of given complexes. Local commissions and boards would have a better idea of what certain neighborhoods of Denver have a need for and could tailor each of the complexes to these needs, providing more or less incentives to developers, and even changing certain parts of the plans such as the amount of space reserved for shops and services should the need arise.

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