

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW

PROJECT PURPOSE & PLANNING CONTEXT

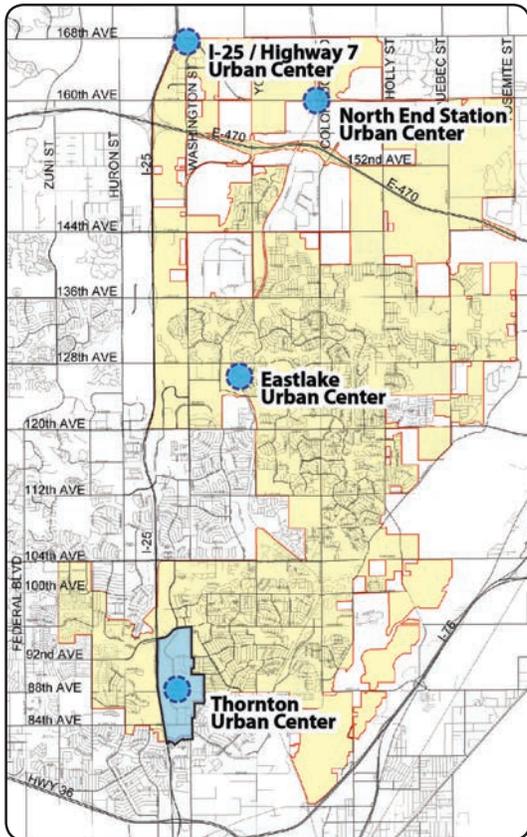
The Thornton Urban Center (TUC) Study is jointly funded by the Federal Transportation Improvement Program and the City of Thornton.

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) fosters regional cooperation among county and municipal governments in the Denver metropolitan area and is the metro area's federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which provides federal funds for regional transportation projects. To meet its mission of "enhancing and protecting the quality of life in our region," DRCOG has designated dozens of Urban Centers throughout the metro area, including four in Thornton, as shown in Map 1-1.

- Thornton City Center / Thornton Urban Center
- Eastlake Urban Center (rail)
- North End Station Urban Center (rail)
- I-25 / Highway 7 Urban Center

As stated in DRCOG's guiding policy document, Metro Vision 2035 Plan, "The Denver metro region will become an international model for healthy, livable communities by developing vibrant urban centers connected by a robust multimodal network throughout the metro area."

The City of Thornton has embraced the DRCOG-designated TUC in several of its policy plans and undertook this Study to develop recommendations to spur reinvestment in the area and create a viable Urban Center in south



Map 1-1: Urban Centers within the City of Thornton Boundary

DRCOG Urban Centers Overview

Vision: The Denver metro region will become an international model for healthy, livable communities by developing vibrant urban centers connected by a robust multi-modal network throughout the metro area. While each urban center will be unique, all urban centers will:

- be active, pedestrian-, bicycle-, and transit-friendly places that are more dense and mixed in use than surrounding areas;
- allow people of all ages, incomes and abilities to access a range of housing, employment, and service opportunities without sole reliance on having to drive;
- promote regional sustainability by reducing per capita vehicle miles traveled, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and water consumption; and
- respect and support existing neighborhoods.

Goal: Urban centers will accommodate 50 percent of new housing and 75 percent of new employment between 2005 and 2035.

Policies

- 1. Regional Advocacy and Investment.** DRCOG will take a proactive role in identifying opportunities, providing resources and directing investment toward programs and infrastructure improvements that help local governments and the private sector develop successful urban centers.
- 2. Minimization of Harmful Competition.** The region will advocate for changes to tax structure to minimize detrimental competition among local governments for revenues and support collaborative progress toward the urban center vision.
- 3. Location.** Metro Vision encourages the development of urban centers at infill and redevelopment sites within the UGB/A throughout the metro area, while recognizing the unique significance of the Denver central business district. Metro Vision prioritizes urban centers around existing or proposed transit stations or with high-frequency bus service.

4. Multimodal Connectivity. Urban centers will have high levels of internal connectivity and will be well-connected to the region at large.

5. Housing Options. Urban centers will support housing suitable for a wide range of incomes and the full spectrum of life stages and physical abilities, providing good links to jobs, services and other opportunities and reducing the combined cost of housing and transportation.

6. Transportation Options. Modes such as walking, bicycling and transit will be equally competitive with driving within urban centers.

7. Design. Innovative planning, zoning and urban design strategies will promote higher-density, mixed-use development, pedestrian activity and accessible public space within urban centers. Parking management strategies, such as parking maximums and pricing strategies where appropriate, will minimize the potential negative effects of parking on urban center development and multimodal access.



Thornton. This Study proposes mobility recommendations for the entire TUC Area, as well as high-level framework plans for five development nodes. Detailed development strategies in the TUC Area, and beyond, are anticipated to be included in the South Thornton Urban Renewal Implementation Plan, which started in the summer of 2013.

The TUC Study seeks to embody the following qualities of successful Urban Centers:

- Balanced transportation modes: walk, bike, transit, car, cab.
- Comfortable and safe for all ages.
- Contains a mix of uses.
- Location for community events.
- Location for cultural activities / venues.
- Contains civic offices.
- Appropriately sized blocks and streets.
- Buildings embrace the streets and public space they face.
- Includes high-quality streets, parks and plazas.
- Changes over time.

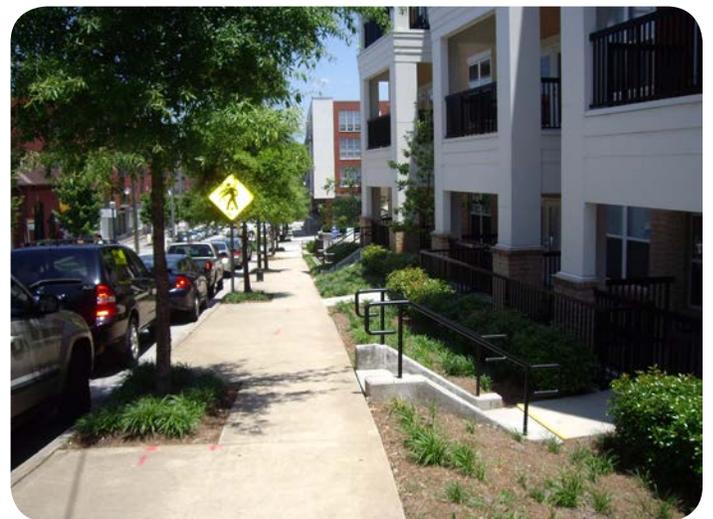
Study Area

Located in south Thornton, the Study Area, as shown in Map 1-2, is bounded by Thornton Pkwy. on the north and the City boundary, which roughly parallels E. 83rd Dr., on the south. I-25 represents the western limits of the Study Area, while Washington, Clarkson and Corona streets represent the eastern limits. The Study Area is 0.5 miles wide and over 1.5 miles long. It includes 535 acres, approximately 200 acres of which are occupied by commercial development, including two older mall sites, several strip malls, a newer Walmart Neighborhood Center, and several medical office buildings. Approximately 70 acres are vacant. Most of the remaining land includes apartment complexes and the Thornton High School campus.

An additional area of influence is located immediately to the west of the Study Area, opposite I-25. As the Study Area increases in density and other Urban Center characteristics, Urban Center development attributes may also be able to expand to newly developed/redeveloped residential and commercial areas west of I-25.

This area of influence has assets that include Niver Creek Open Space and North Creek Park. Formal action to expand the designated Urban Center area may be warranted in the future, subject to DRCOG's criteria and approval process.

Development of the Study Area began in the 1950s with the Thornton Shopping Center built to serve Original Thornton, the City's first residential neighborhood, located east of the Study Area. In recent decades, the Study Area has experienced significant disinvestment as the City has grown toward the north.



Examples: Qualities of successful Urban Centers



Regulating & Guiding Documents

The City of Thornton has completed several plans that address the Study Area, shown in Map 1-2, and the four most relevant are described below.

South Thornton Revitalization Subarea Plan (STaR) – August 2011

The STaR Plan is a policy document designed to inform future revitalization efforts in south Thornton, bounded by the City boundary to the west and south, Union Pacific Railroad on the east, and Thornton Parkway on the north.

STaR’s vision statement for south Thornton is:

“South Thornton competes regionally for residential quality of life and commercial and employment opportunities. To do this, south Thornton’s feel and image must be developed into a family-friendly community, where people can walk to places, socialize with others, and feel safe in an environment that is aesthetically pleasing.”

The Plan defines five goals to achieve this vision:

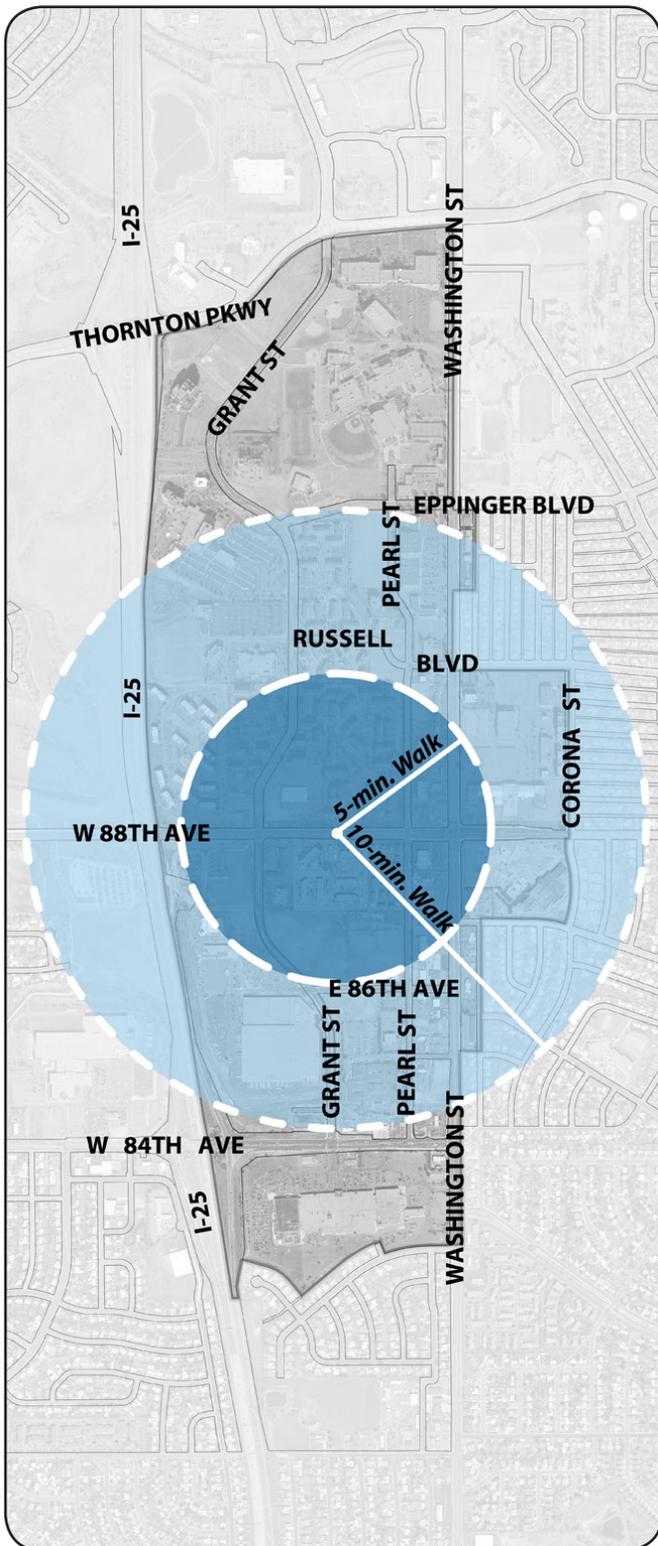
- Goal A: Create more appropriate retail and reduce the number of vacant buildings.
- Goal B: Capitalize on the strengths and unique regional character of the area.
- Goal C: Improve physical conditions of the area.
- Goal D: Increase the buying power of the neighborhood by inspiring residents to improve their existing homes and neighborhoods.
- Goal E: Enhance access between and within the east and west sides of south Thornton.

Health Impact Assessment – April 2012

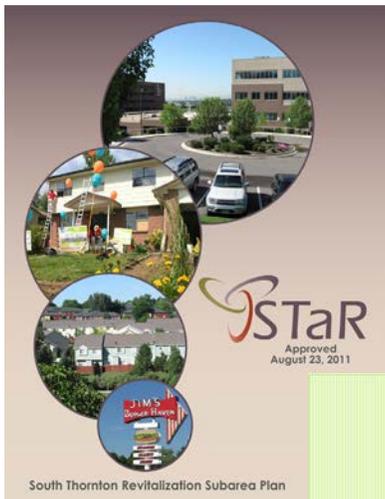
The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) was specifically conducted to determine potential impacts of the STaR Plan on healthy eating and active living. The HIA findings show that, in general, STaR Plan revitalization strategies support positive health outcomes for south Thornton community members. The HIA report identifies 16 healthy eating and active living recommendations that augment the existing STaR Plan goals and strategies.

The Mayor’s Institute on City Design

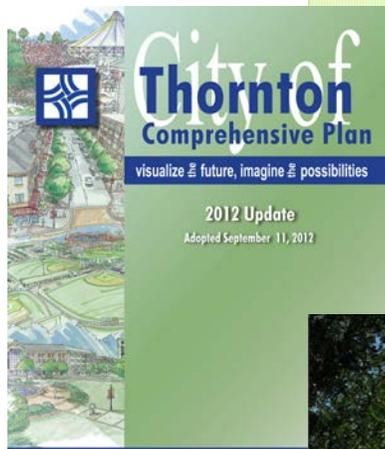
The Mayor’s Institute on City Design is a program that conducts a series of intimate, closed-door two-day symposia that offers invited mayors insight into a design issue. The panel includes mayors, design experts and policy people. The panel reviewed the TUC area in October 2012 and resulted in recommendations consistent with this TUC Study.



Map 1-2: TUC Study Area Boundary with Walking Radii



A Health Impact Assessment of the South Thornton Revitalization Subarea Plan
Addressing Healthy Eating and Active Living in South Thornton, Colorado
April 10, 2012



2012 Comprehensive Plan – September 2012

The 2012 Comprehensive Plan establishes goals, major strategies and key policies for Thornton’s neighborhoods, future jobs, and potential amenities for City residents. The Comprehensive Plan designates six catalyst Placemaking Districts located throughout the City that will collectively serve the purpose of a downtown, including a health services district that covers the northern 2/3 of the Study Area and a civic arts district along Thornton Pkwy. / 92nd Ave. The map also identifies a placemaking culture trail along 88th Ave. and Washington St.; defines Washington St. as a primary corridor / parkway treatment; and slates the intersection of Washington St. and Thornton Pkwy. for major intersection treatment.

Thornton Transportation Plan – July 2009

The Transportation Plan is the City’s long-range plan for travel and mobility. The Plan identifies Washington St. as one of three major north-south regional corridors besides I-25, and 88th Ave. is an important east-west link. The Plan contains five goals including developing a multimodal transportation system and recognizing the important relationship between land use and transportation.

Process & Participants

The Project Team, consisting of City staff, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and the Consulting Team, was primarily responsible for development of the TUC Study. The TAC included 11 representatives from several City departments, including current planning, redevelopment, transportation, arts and culture, parks and open space, senior services, and public safety.

The yearlong TUC Study began in August 2012 and included a kick-off meeting with City staff, two meetings with the TAC, and a tour of the Study Area. In September, the Consulting Team gathered input from various stakeholders, including property owners, business owners and institutional uses, via approximately 20 one-on-one listening sessions, and met with several boards, commissions and agencies, such as the Thornton Senior Citizen Board and the Thornton Arts, Sciences and Humanities Council, as well as the Adams County Economic Development department and the Adams County Housing Authority.

Existing: City plans affecting the Thornton Urban Center



Phase	Meeting	Date	Focus
analysis	Technical Advisory Committee	8/23/12	Project kick-off/Site tour
	Technical Advisory Committee	8/24/12	Background information shared w/ team
	Harvest Fest	9/8/12	Project info/visual preference survey
	Stakeholders	9/19/12	Listening
	Community meeting	9/24/12	Presentation of analysis/listening session
	Boards and Commissions	9/25/12	Analysis/listening
	Agencies	9/28/12	Analysis/listening
	Technical Advisory Committee	10/12/12	Analysis
	Council update	10/16/12	Project update/analysis summary
draft strategies	Technical Advisory Committee	11/30/12	Present/discuss draft strategies
	Council update	12/11/12	Project update
	Council update	2/19/13	Project update
final strategies / documentation	Technical Advisory Committee	4/5/13	Present/discuss final strategies
	Council update	4/16/13	Project update
	Agencies	4/17/13	Present/discuss final strategies
	Boards and Commissions	4/17/13	Present/discuss final strategies
	Community open house	4/24/13	Open house - final strategies
	Council update	7/30/13	Project update
	Council acceptance	8/27/13	Study acceptance

Table 1-1: Summary of Project Meetings



These meetings allowed the Consulting Team to understand previous and ongoing efforts in the TUC as well as area issues and opportunities.

Also in September, the Project Team held the first community meeting, which attracted approximately 30 participants. At this meeting, a representative from DRCOG provided information on Urban Centers, and meeting attendees participated in a visual preference survey as well as a break-out group exercise to envision a long-term future for the Study Area.

After this first round of meetings, the Consulting Team conducted market, transportation, and physical analyses. The Consulting Team then presented their findings to City staff, the TAC and City Council in October. The Project Team met again in November to talk about development opportunities in a few key locations within the Study Area. In December and February, the Consulting Team provided a project update to City Council regarding the progress of draft revitalization strategies.

Over the next two months, the Consulting Team prepared mobility recommendations for the entire Study Area and framework plans for five development nodes. In April 2013, the Consulting Team presented these plans to City staff, the TAC and City Council. A community open house in April was attended by approximately 40 individuals, including residents, developers, and representatives from City Council and RTD.

A final City Council update in July preceded formal acceptance of this TUC Study on August 27, 2013.



Technical Advisory Committee meeting



Community meeting held September 24, 2012



Community open house held April 24, 2013



Community open house held April 24, 2013