



THORNTON
PLANNING ACADEMY

Zoning, Land Use & Development Review

Current Planning

September 23, 2026

Purpose

Provide an overview of what Current Planning involves and explain how it relates to Long Range Planning.

Agenda

- What is Zoning?
- Interactive Exercise
- Development Review Process
- Thornton Example

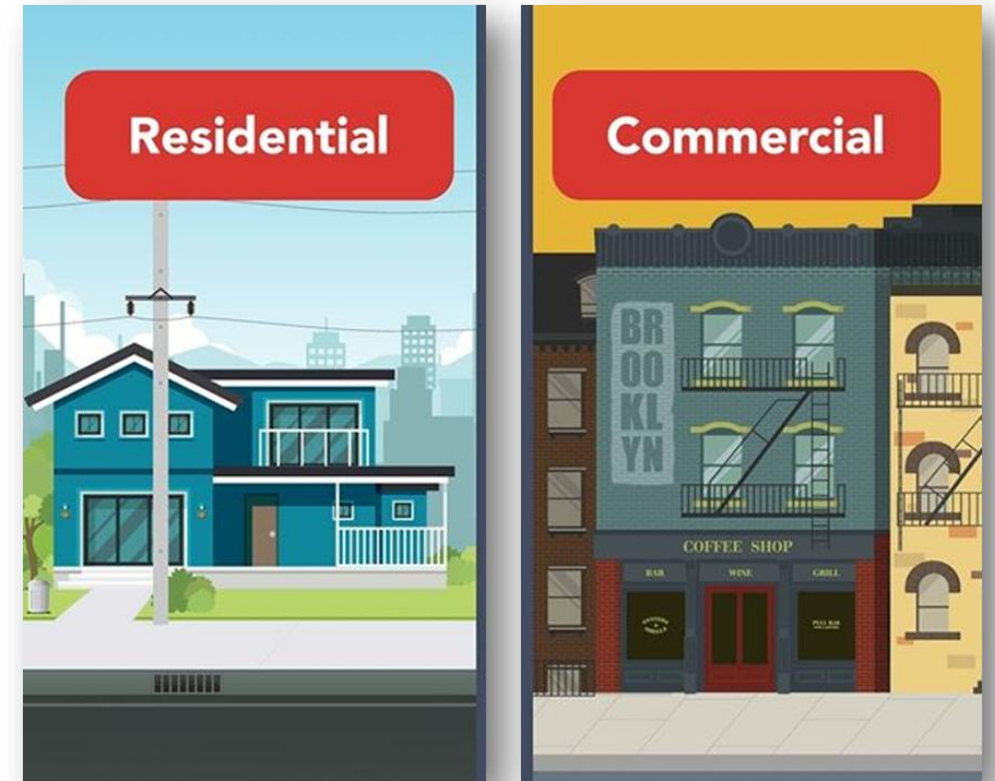
Why Do We Have Zoning?

- Organizes land uses into districts
- Established within Development Code
- Zoning regulations deal with:
 - Property rights – how a site can/can't be used
 - Safety & aesthetics – design considerations



Thornton Development Code

Chapter 18 of the Thornton City Code

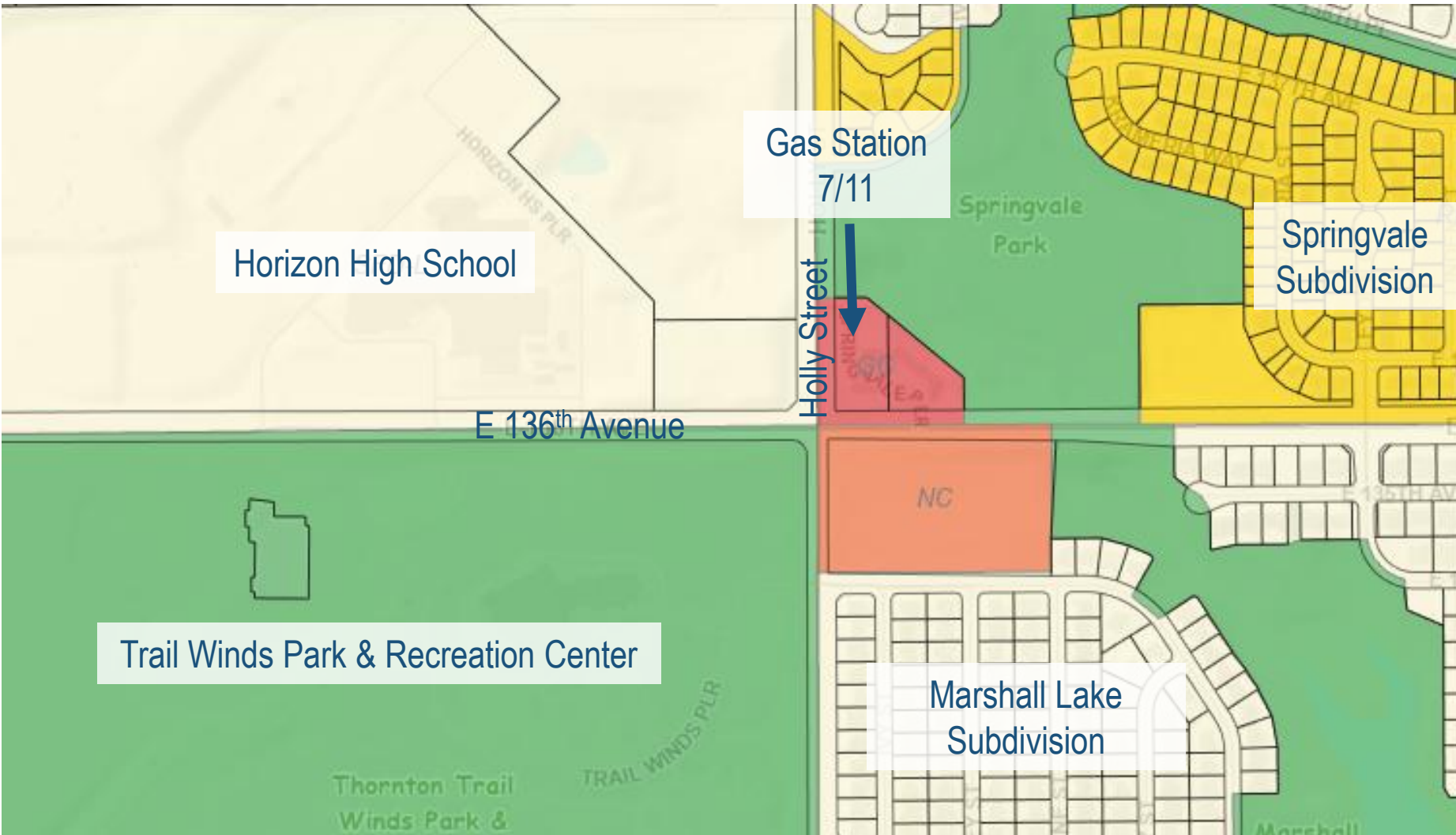


Zoning Map Snapshot

Zoning

DISTRICT

- Agricultural
- Business Park
- City Center - Legacy
- Civic Institutional
- Development Reserve
- Eastlake Business
- Employment Center - Legacy
- Eastlake Office
- Eastlake Residential
- Eastlake Service
- Eastlake Transit-Oriented Development
- General Commercial
- Industrial - Legacy
- Mineral Conservation - Legacy
- Manufactured Home - Legacy
- Mixed-Use
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Planned Development - Legacy
- Parks and Open Space
- Regional Commercial
- Residential Estate
- Residential - High Density
- Residential - Low Density
- Residential - Mid Density
- Single-Family Detached - Legacy
- Transit-Oriented Development



Zoning Categories & Districts

Zoning Categories

Residential

Mixed-Use

Commercial & Employment

Other

Eastlake

Legacy

Zoning Districts

Residential Base Districts

-  RE - Residential Estate
-  RL - Residential - Low Density
-  RM - Residential - Mid Density
-  RH - Residential - High Density

Mixed-Use Base Districts

-  MU - Mixed-Use
-  TOD - Transit-Oriented Development

Commercial and Employment

-  NC - Neighborhood Commercial
-  GC - General Commercial
-  RC - Regional Commercial
-  BP - Business Park

Other Base Districts

-  CI - Civic Institutional
-  DR - Development Reserve
-  AG - Agricultural
-  POS - Parks and Open Space

Eastlake Base Districts

-  ER - Eastlake Residential
-  EO - Eastlake Office
-  EB - Eastlake Business
-  ES - Eastlake Service
-  ETD - Eastlake Transit-Oriented Development

Legacy Base Districts

-  SFD-L - Single-Family Detached Legacy
-  MH-L - Mobile Home Legacy
-  PD-L - Planned Development Legacy
-  CC-L - City Center Legacy
-  EC-L - Employment Center Legacy
-  I-L - Industrial Legacy
-  MC-L - Mineral Conservation Legacy

Overlay Districts

-  NW-O - North Washington Subarea
-  PD-O - Planned Development Overlay

General Land Use Categories

Agriculture & Animal Related

Commercial

Entertainment

Industrial, Automotive & Transportation

Lodging

Public & Institutional

Residential

Utilities & Infrastructure

Accessory

Temporary

Land Use

Specific Land Uses (Residential)

Cottage Housing (single lot)

Duplex (single lot)

Dwelling, 1 Unit Detached (single lot)

Dwelling, 2 Units Attached (1 unit per lot)

Dwelling, 3-8 Units Attached (1 unit per lot)

Dwelling, Live-Work

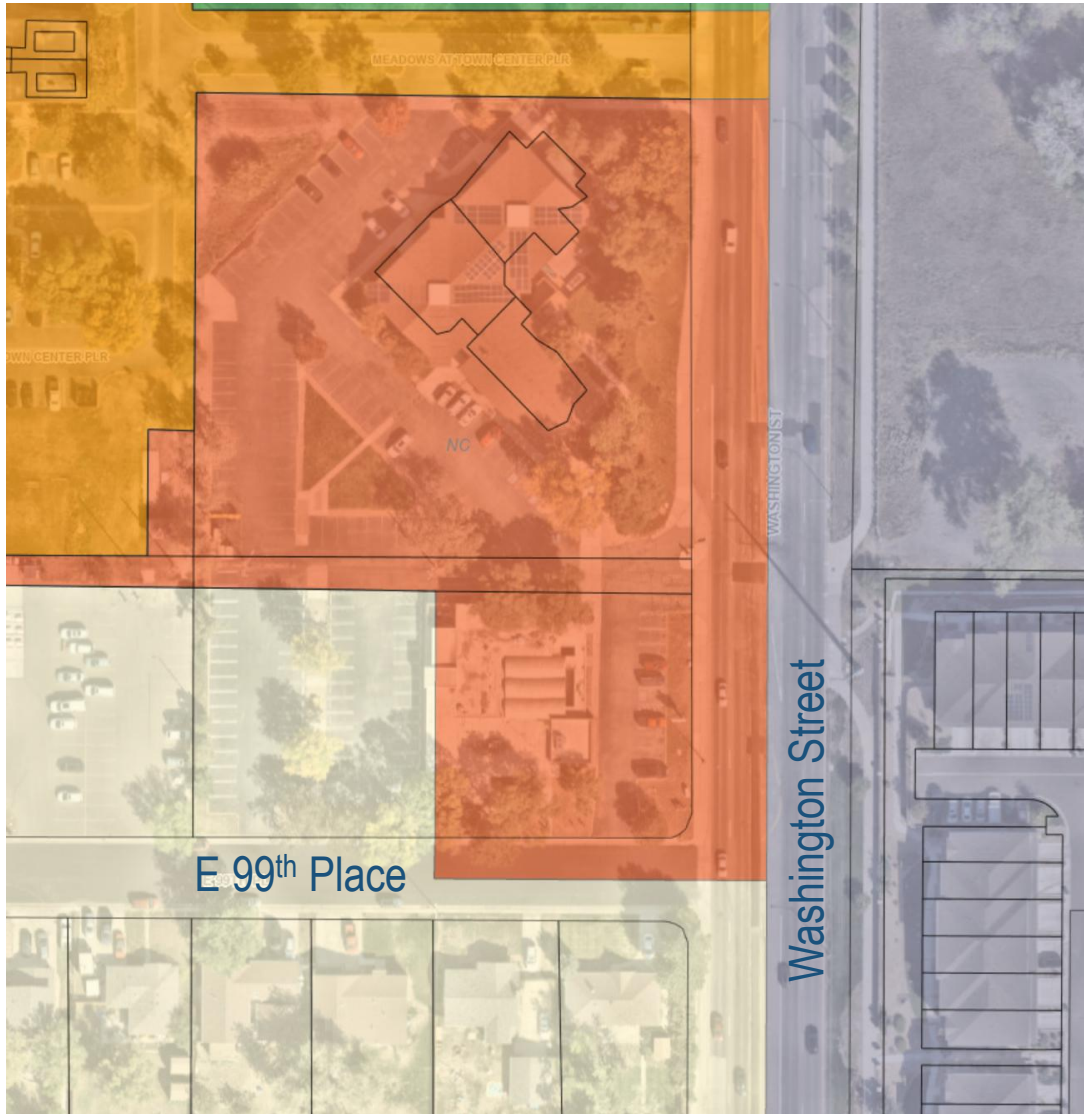
Manufactured Home Park

Multi-Unit Dwelling (single lot)

Multi-Unit Dwelling Complex (single lot)

Multi-Unit Dwelling, Above Ground Floor (single lot)

Triplex/Quadplex (single lot)



Neighborhood Commercial

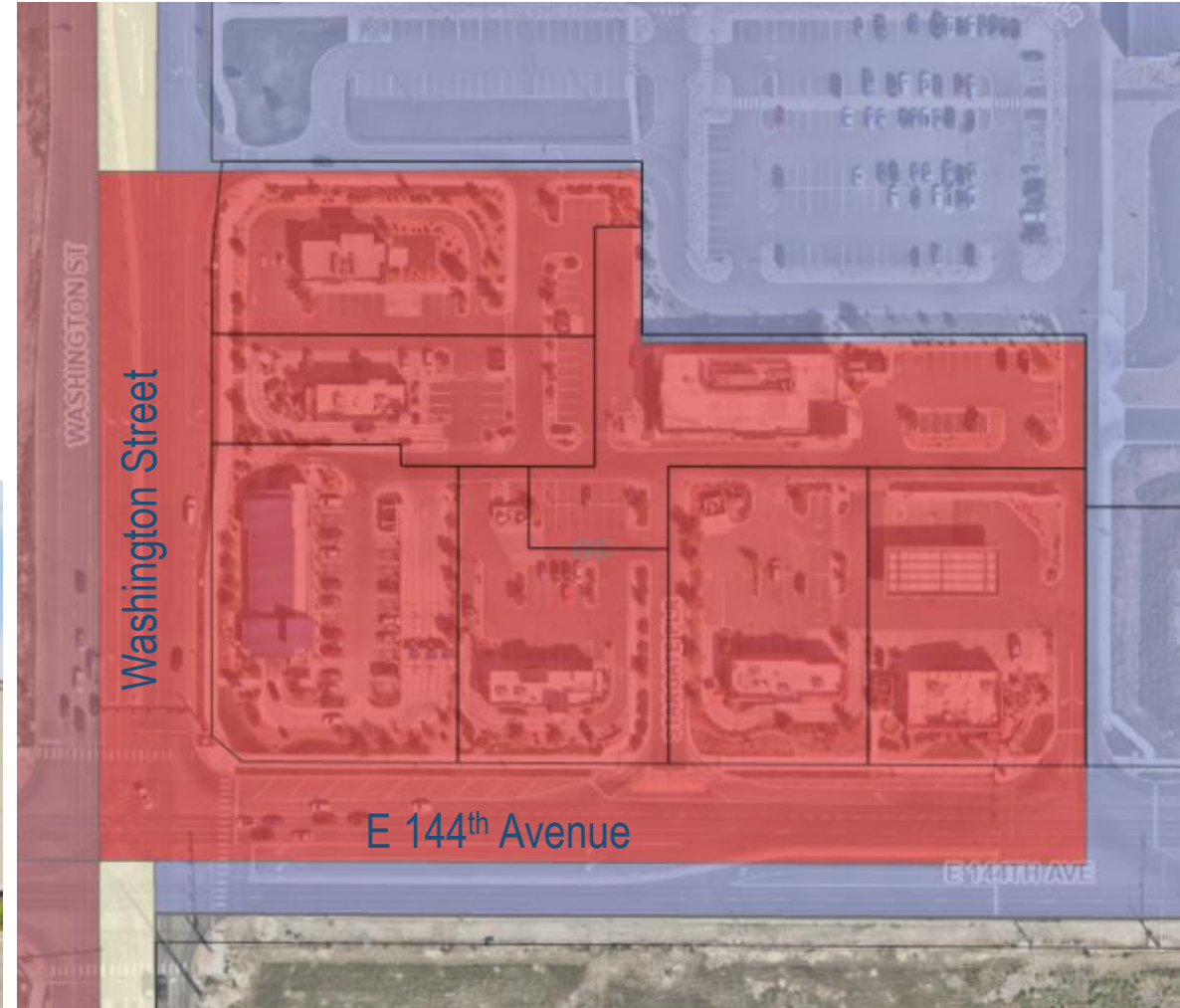
Accommodates small-scale nonresidential development & activity centers to serve the needs of nearby residents.



Accommodates mid-scale, citywide-serving, nonresidential development & activity centers. Intended to preserve opportunities for commercial uses over the long-term to maintain fiscal viability of the city.

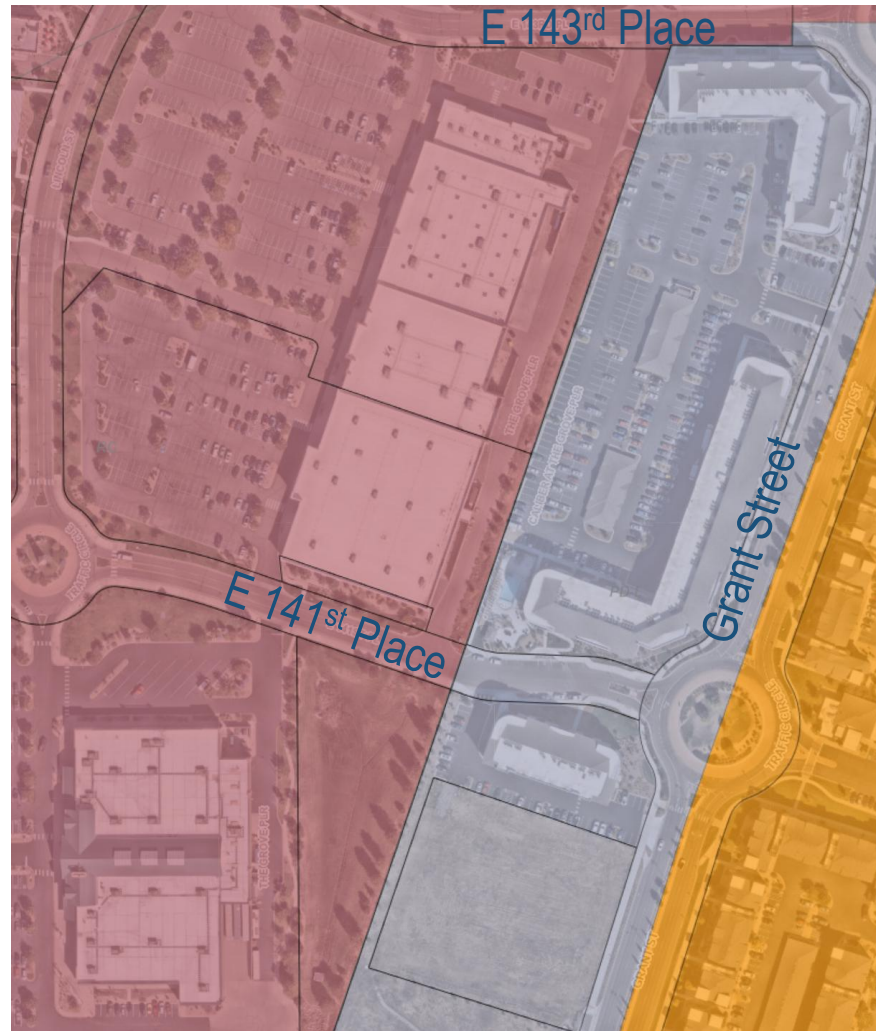


General Commercial



Regional Commercial

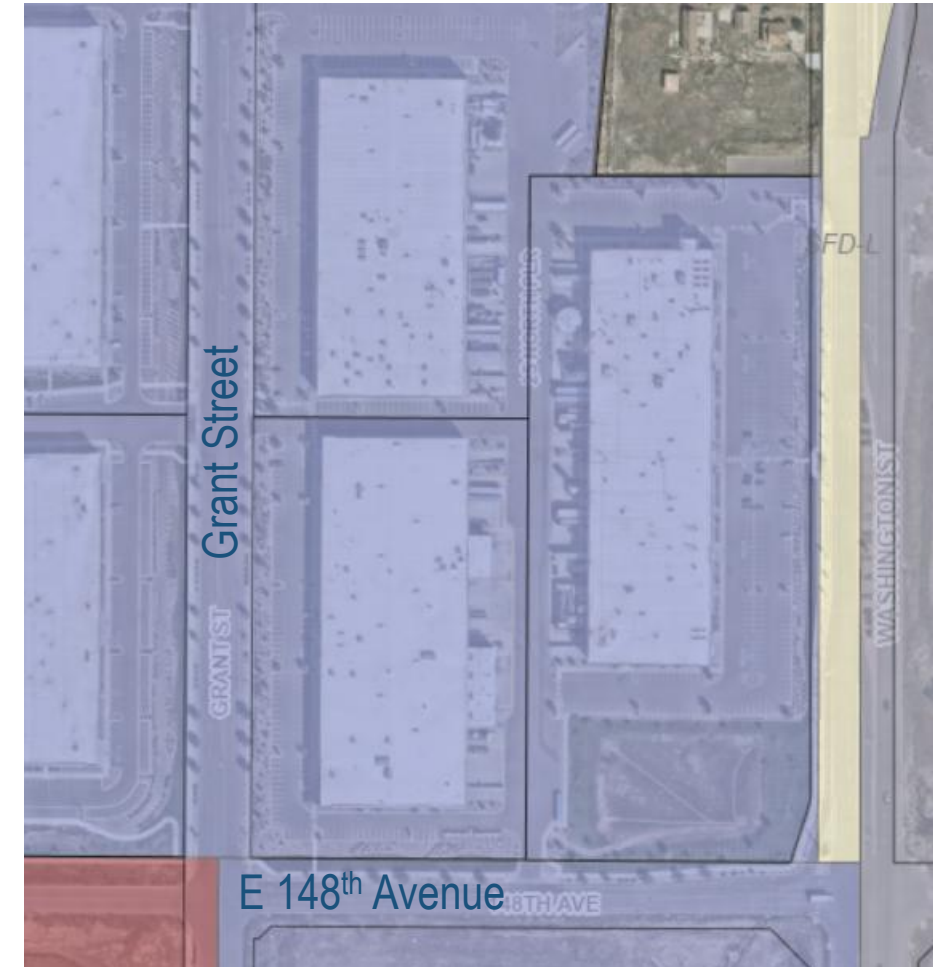
Accommodates large-scale, region-serving nonresidential development & activity centers. Intended to create regional destinations & allow limited high density residential development as a supporting use to help activate nonresidential areas throughout the day.



Accommodates clustered areas of primary employment. Intended to support business parks & corporate campuses that complement & enhance the image & identity of the city.



Business Park



Comp Plan & Zoning Relationship

Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Designation

Development Code Zone District

Urban Reserve (UR)

Development Reserve - DR

Parks, Trails, and Open Space (PTO)

**Parks and Open Space - POS
Agricultural - AG**

Estate Neighborhood (EN)

**Agricultural - AG
Residential Estate - RE**

Single-Family Neighborhoods (SFN)

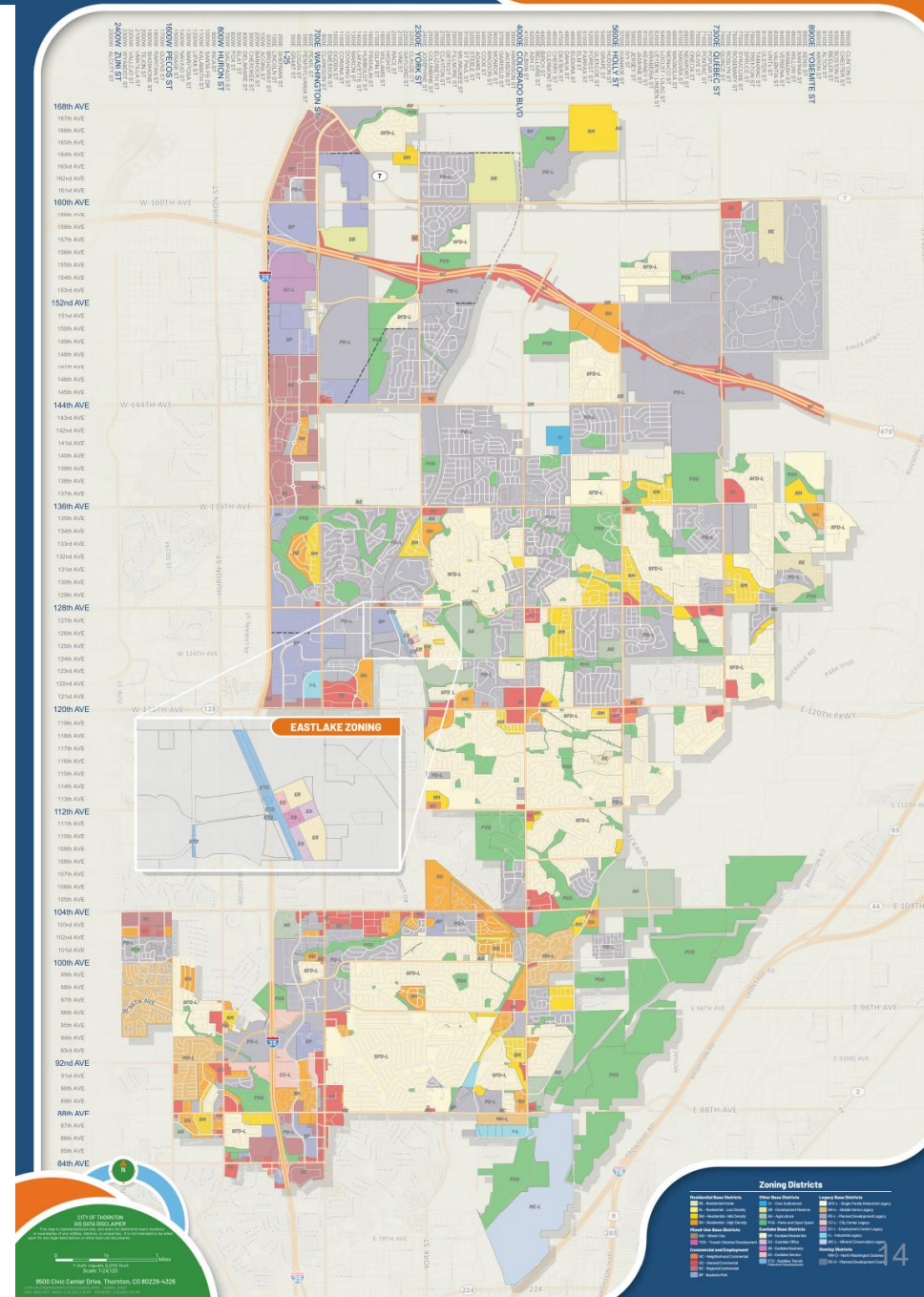
**Single-Family Detached (Legacy) - SFD-L
Residential-Low Density - RL
Residential-Mid Density - RM**

Mixed Residential Neighborhoods (MRN)

**Residential-Mid Density - RM
Residential-High Density - RH
Manufactured Home (Legacy) - MH-L**

Mixed-Use Neighborhoods (MUN)

**Residential-Mid Density - RM
Residential-High Density - RH
Mixed-Use - MU
Neighborhood Commercial - NC**



Comprehensive Plan

Future Land Use Designation

Development Code

Zone District

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Transit-Oriented Development - TOD

Commercial (COM)

Neighborhood Commercial - NC
General Commercial - GC

Community Mixed-Use (CMU)

Residential-High Density - RH
Mixed-Use - MU
Neighborhood Commercial - NC
General Commercial - GC

Regional Mixed-Use (RMU)

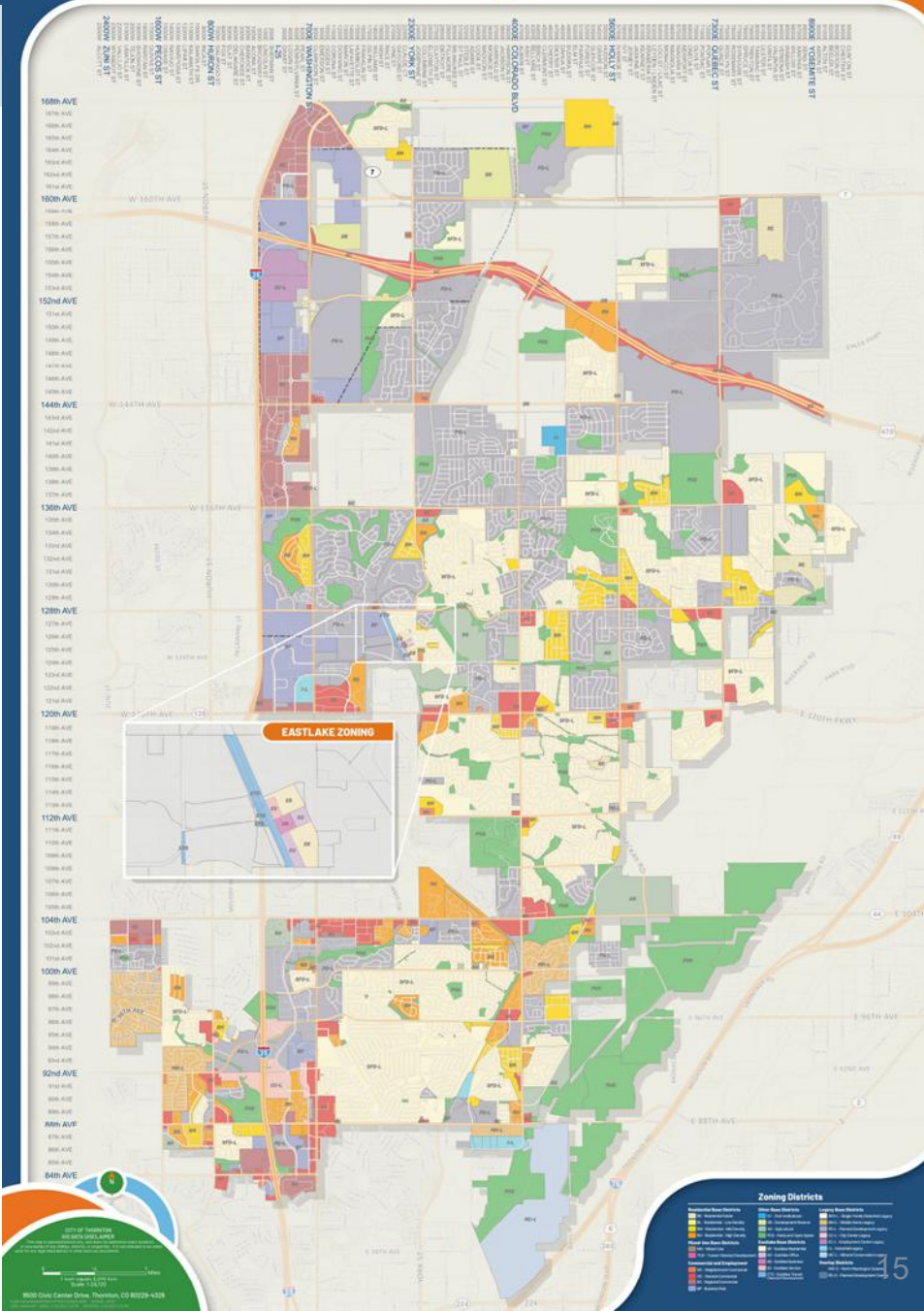
Residential-High Density - RH
Mixed-Use - MU
Regional Commercial - RC
Business Park - BP

Employment Center (EC + ECW)

Regional Commercial - RC
Business Park - BP

Institutional (INS)

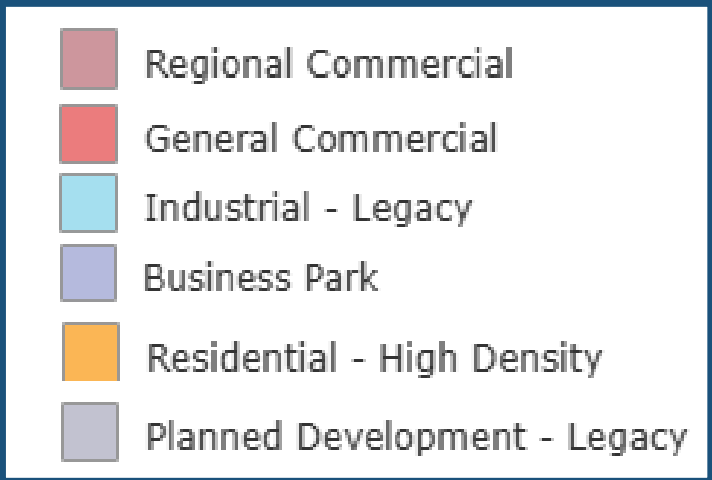
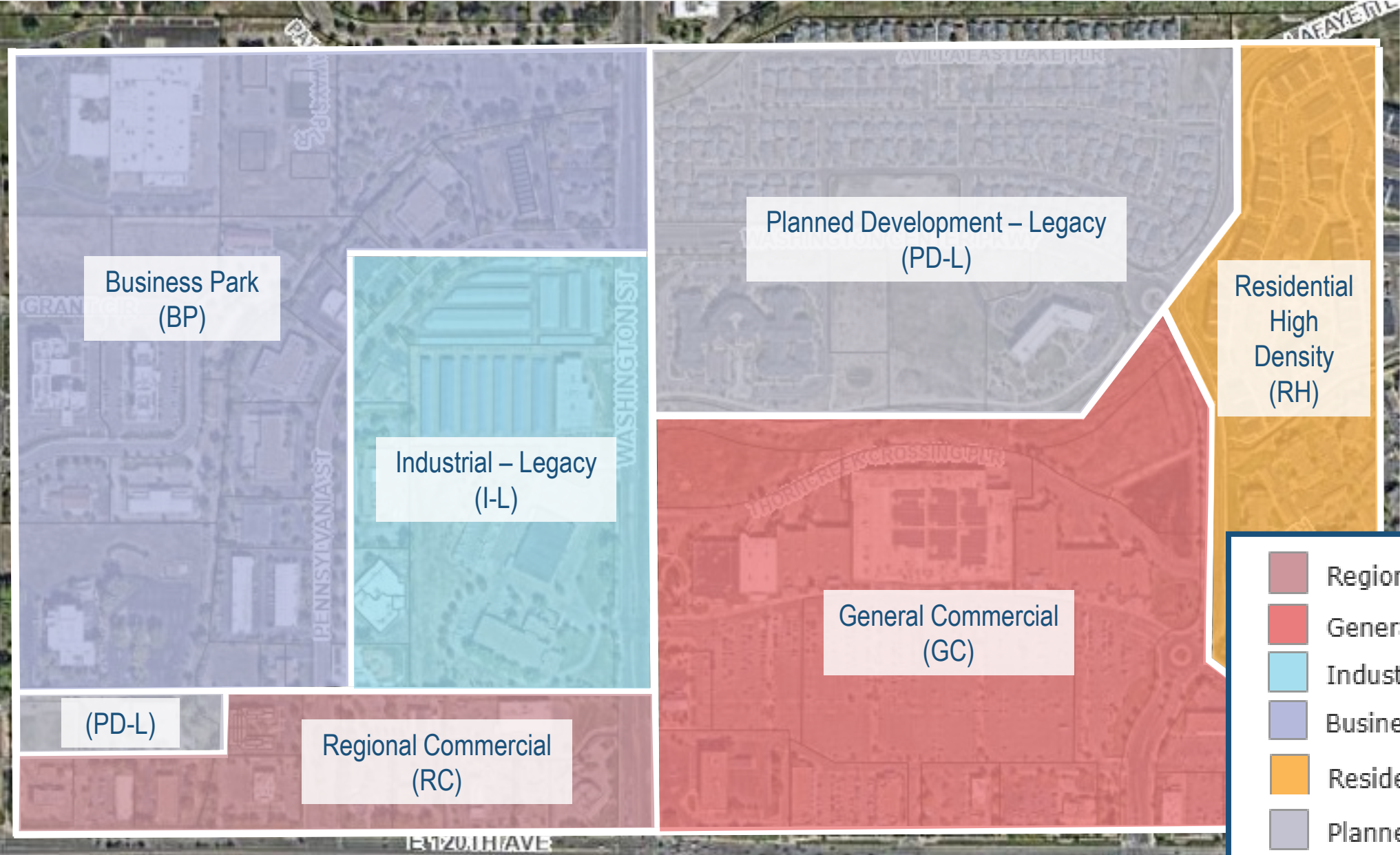
Civic Institutional - CI



Zoning District Activity

Identify the zoning district based on the land uses.

Activity Example



Zoning District Activity

Your Turn!

Development Code Sections

- Development Review Procedures
- Zoning
- Use Standards
- Oil & Gas Regulations
- General Development Standards
- Building & Site Design Standards
- Landscape Standards
- Access & Mobility Standards
- Subdivision Standards
- Sign Standards
- Nonconformities
- Interpretations & Definitions

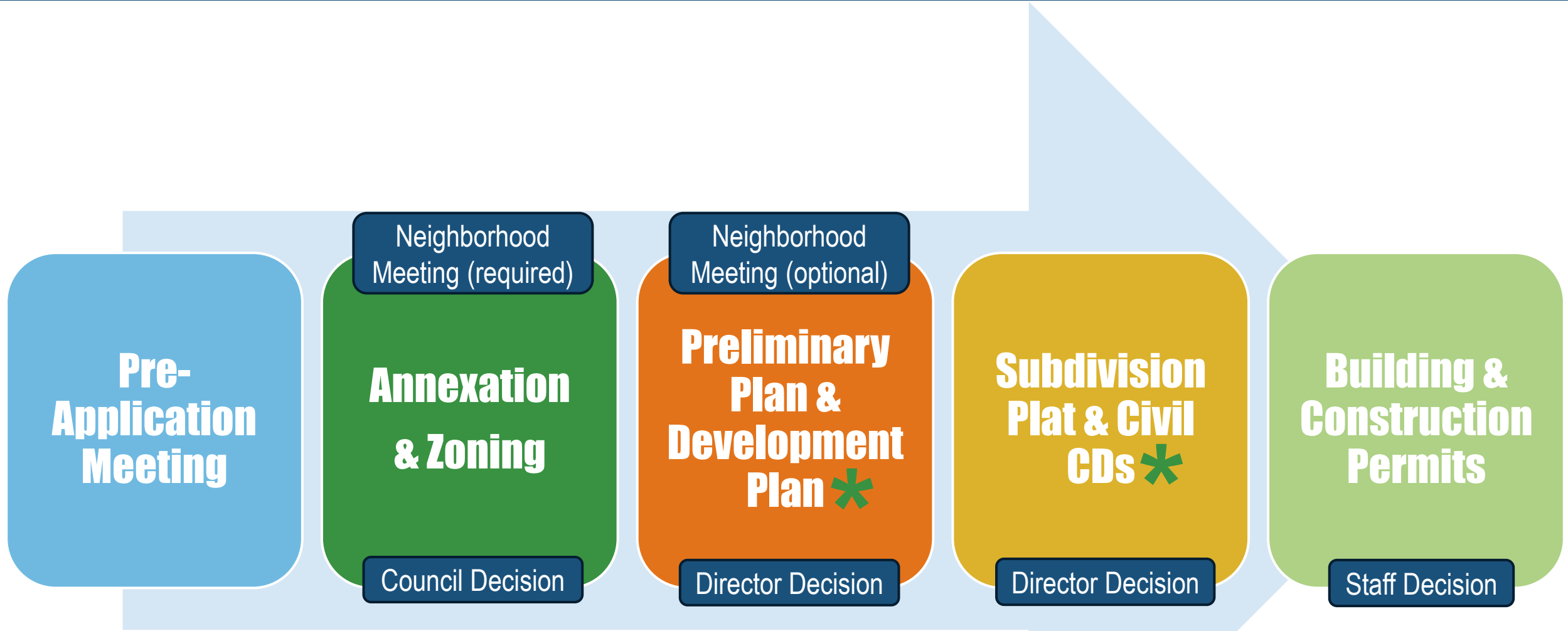
Applications

Quasi-Judicial (Public Hearing)

- Annexation
- Zoning Amendment
- Comprehensive Plan Amendment
- Metropolitan District
- Special Use Permit
- Variance

Administrative

- Preliminary Plan
- Development Plan
- Residential Design Review
- Temporary Use Permit





Pre-Application Meeting

- Prior to submitting a formal application.
- Required for certain case types & optional for others.
- City divisions that are typically part of review:
 - Planning (Current & Long Range)
 - Landscape Architecture
 - Development Engineering
 - Fire & Building Inspection
- Neighborhood Meeting: Not required
- Public Hearings: Not applicable
- Decision: Not applicable

Annexation & Zoning

- First applications required to develop in the city.
- **Annexation** – Process of bringing unincorporated land into city limits.
- **Zoning** – All annexed land must establish a zoning designation. Amendments can also be proposed to existing zone districts.
- Neighborhood Meeting: Required
- Public Hearings: Planning Commission & City Council
- Decision: City Council

**Preliminary
Plan &
Development
Plan**

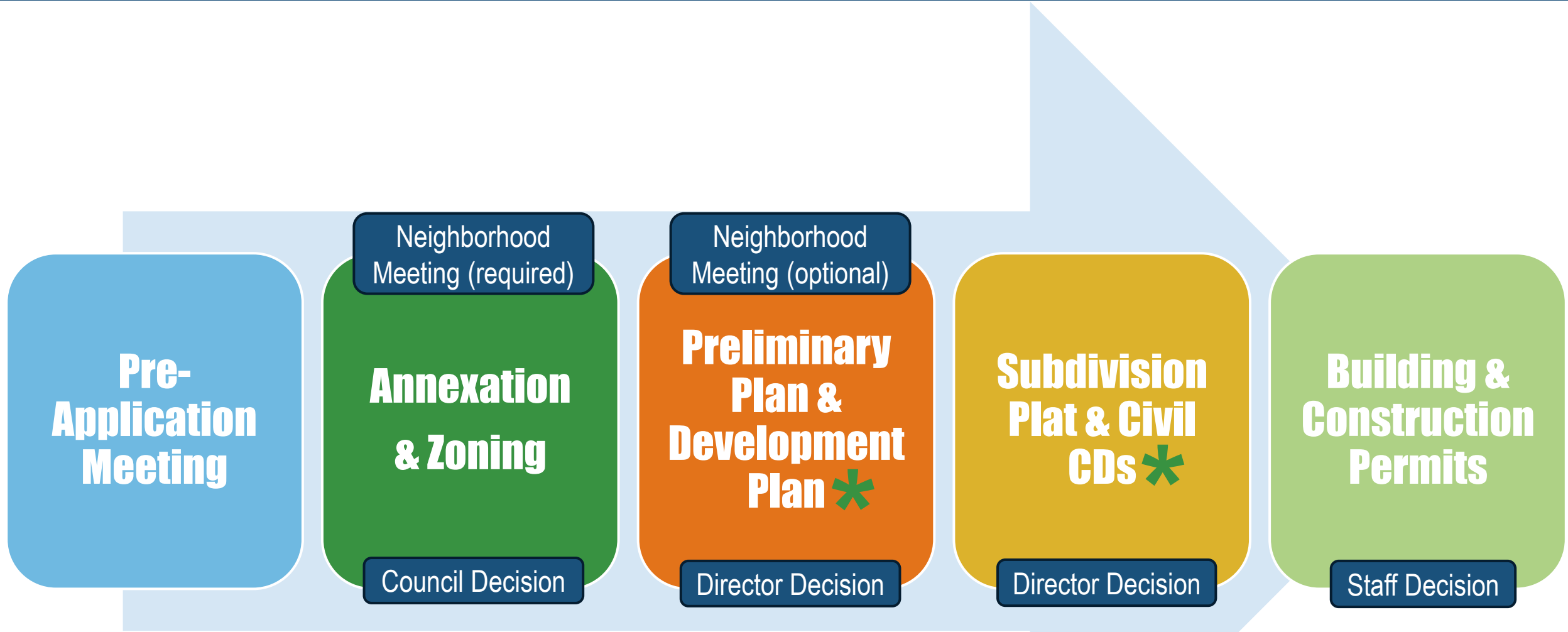
- Follows approval of Annexation & Zoning.
- **Preliminary Plan** – Conceptual vision for development. Identifies general land uses & locations.
- **Development Plan** – Provides assurance of conformance with applicable standards through review of site, landscape, & architectural plans.
- Neighborhood Meeting: Required for Preliminary Plan, Optional per director discretion for Development Plan
- Public Hearings: Not applicable
- Decision: Director

**Subdivision
Plat & Civil
CDs**

- Follows approval of Preliminary & Development Plans.
- **Subdivision Plat** – A map recorded with the County that identifies subdivided parcels, associated easements & streets.
- **Civil Construction Documents** – Plans of all the infrastructure required for a development such as streets & utilities.
- Neighborhood Meeting: Not required
- Public Hearings: Not applicable
- Decision: Director

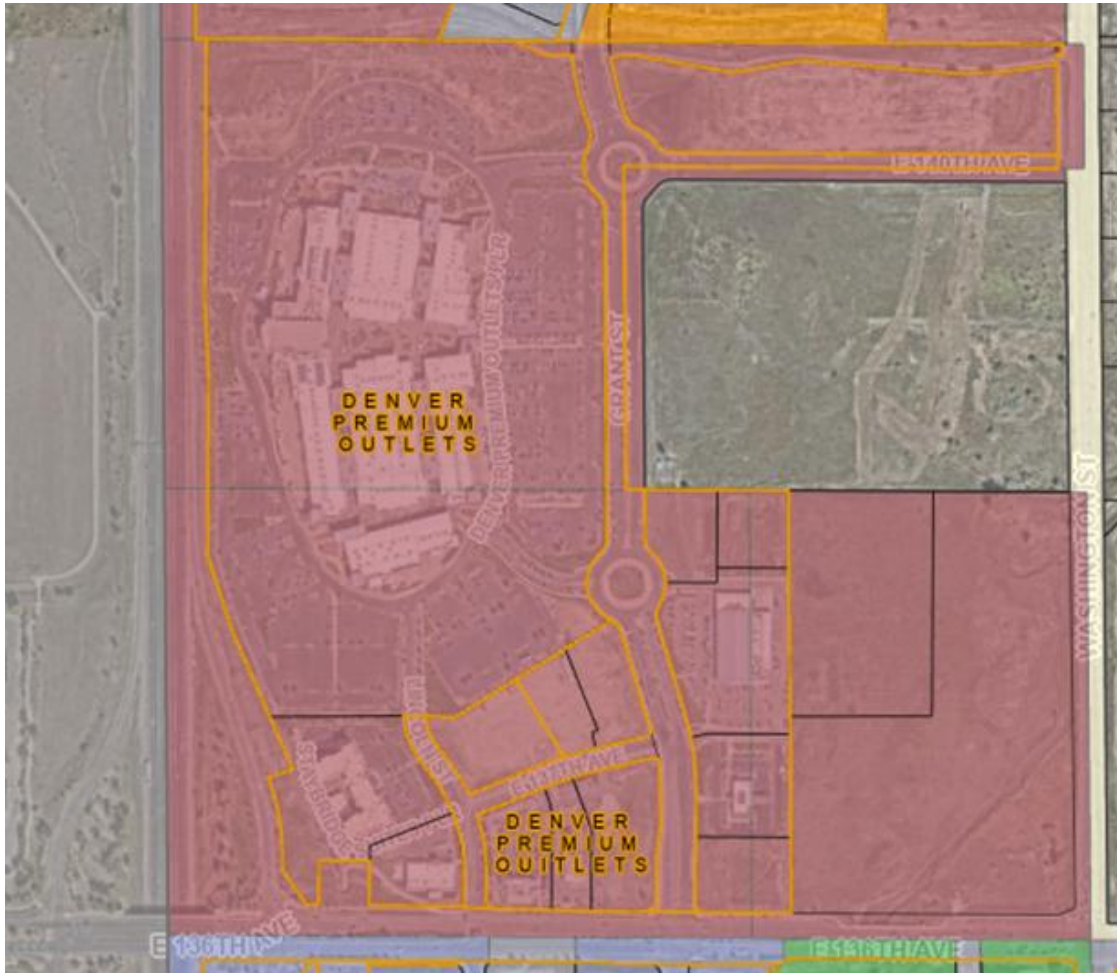
Building & Construction Permits

- Follows approval of all other applications.
- **Building Permit** – Review of detailed plans (electrical, plumbing, mechanical, etc.) for proposed structures.
- **Construction Permit** – Must be issued before any site work (grading or infrastructure installation) occurs.
- Neighborhood Meeting: Not required
- Public Hearings: Not applicable
- Decision: Staff

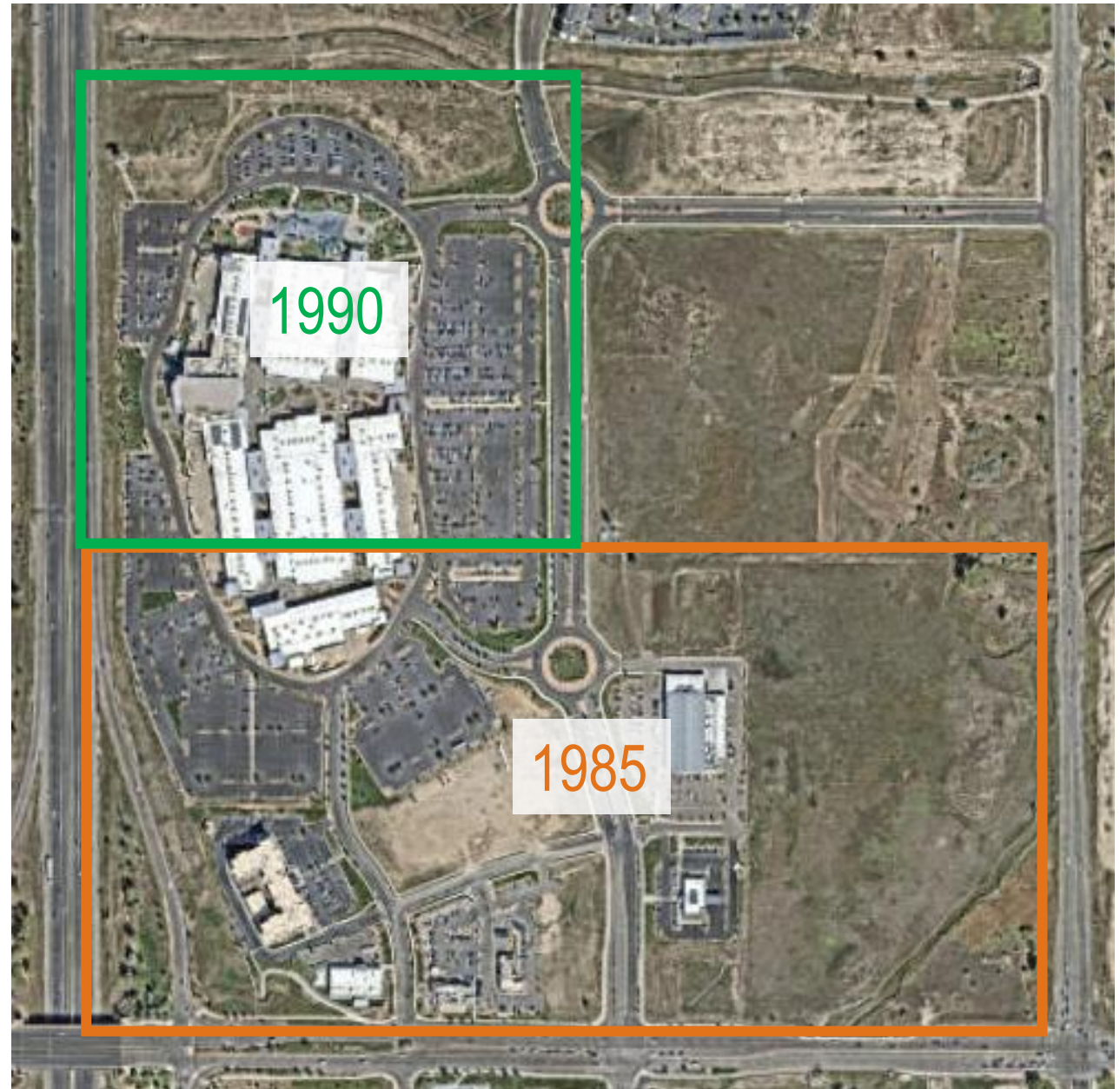


Thornton Example

Thornton Example: Denver Premium Outlets



Annexation



Thornton Example: Denver Premium Outlets

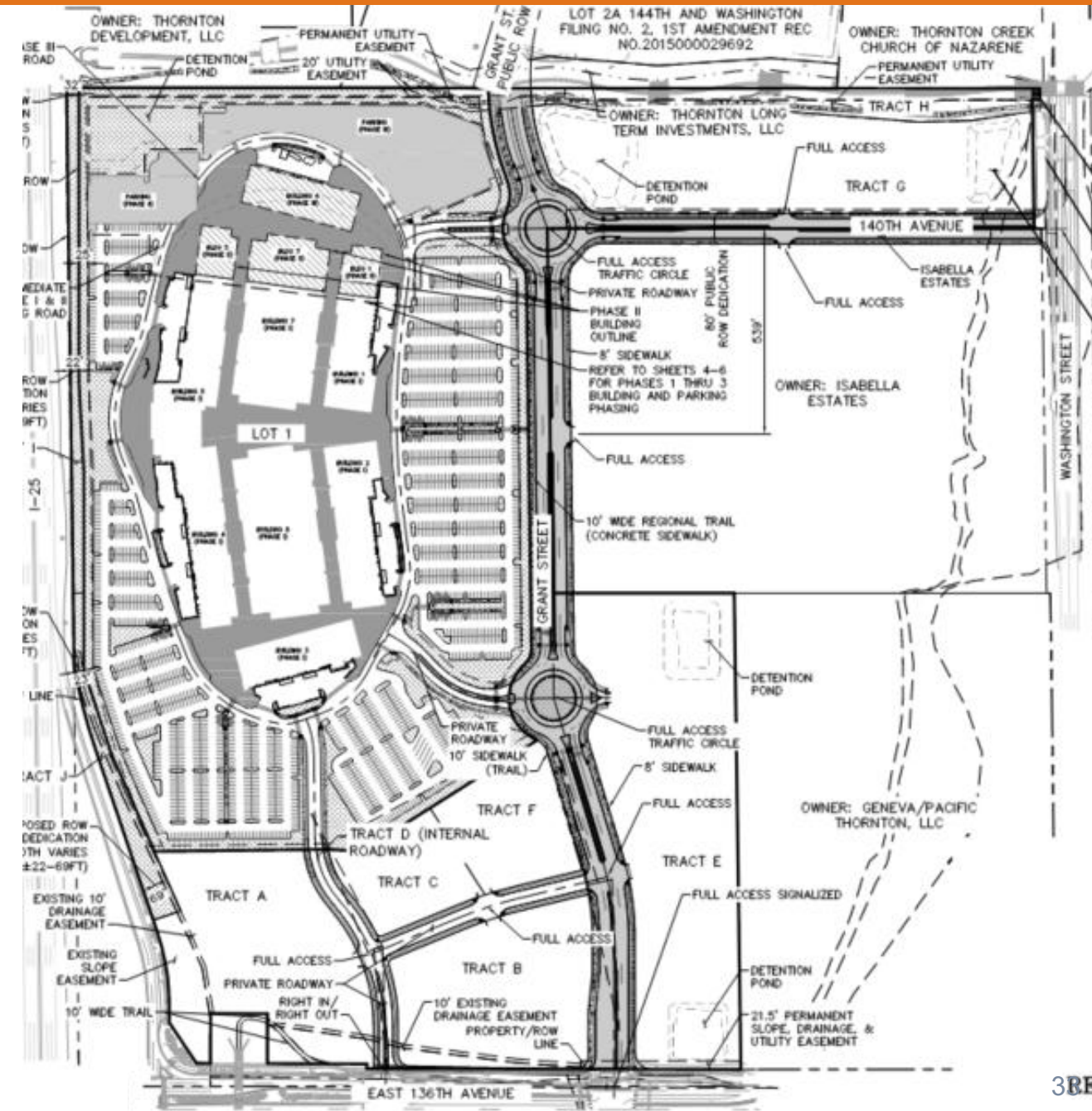
Zoning: Pre-2005



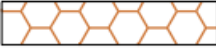
Zoning: 2005

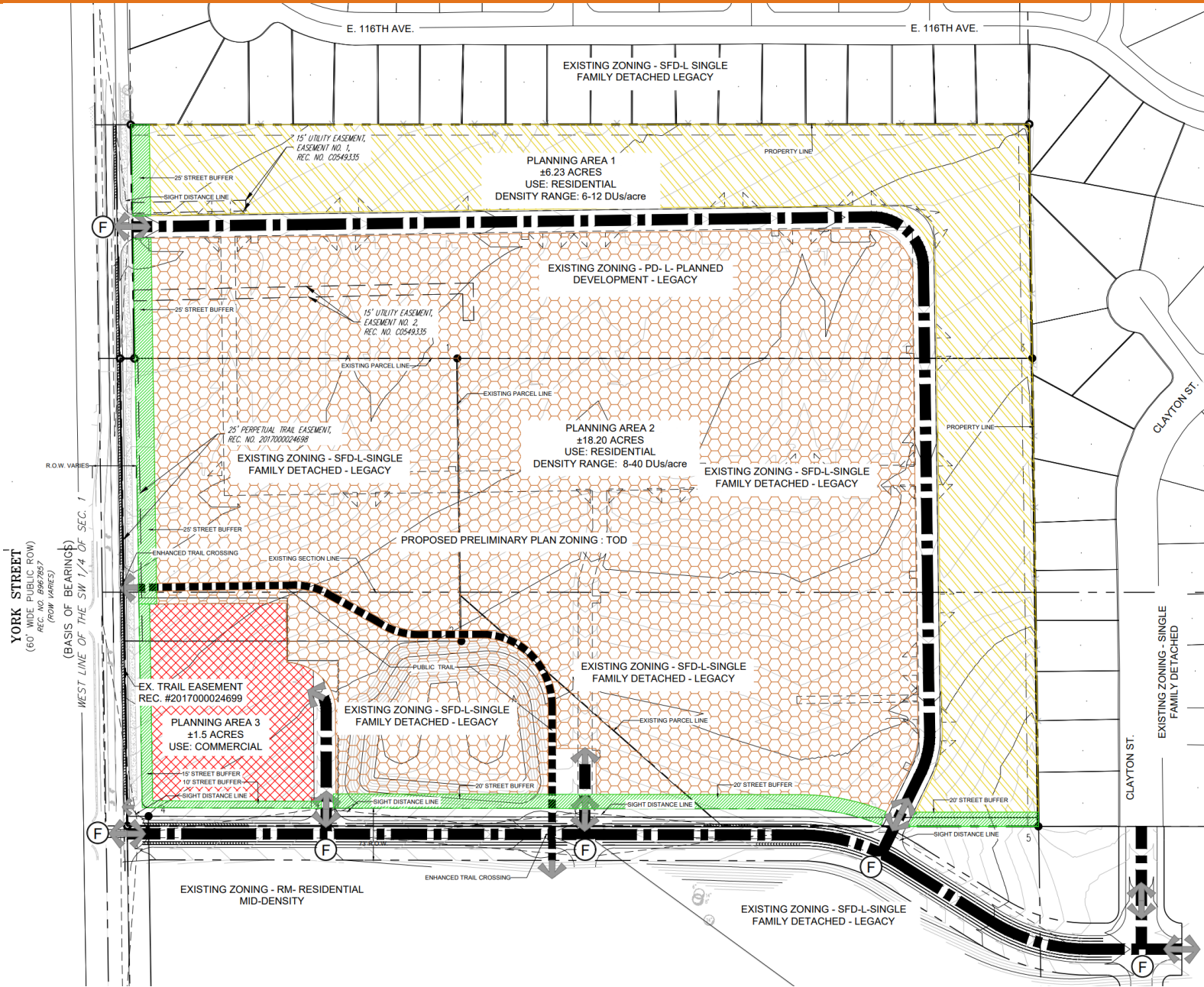


Preliminary Plan: 2016



Thornton Example: Present Day Preliminary Plan

PRELIMINARY PLAN LEGEND	
PLANNING AREA / LAND-USE TYPE	
	PLANNING AREA 1 SINGLE FAMILY ATTACHED RESIDENTIAL
	PANNING AREA 2 - MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
	PLANNING AREA 3 - COMMERCIAL
	REQUIRED STREET BUFFER AREAS
	PROPOSED VEHICULAR CIRCULATION
	PROPOSED LOCAL TRAIL CONNECTION
TRAFFIC MOVEMENTS	
	FULL MOVEMENT



Thornton Example: Denver Premium Outlets



Break

Development Review and Planner of the Day (POD)

Current Planning

Session 2



THORNTON
PLANNING ACADEMY

Purpose

Gain an understanding of current planning processes and every-day planning responsibilities.

Agenda

- Development Review Process
- Planner of the Day duties
- Interactive Exercise

Regional Commercial (RC) Zone District

- Examples of Allowable Uses
 - Sit Down/Drive Through Restaurants
 - Retail Buildings
 - Breweries
 - Entertainment uses (Movie theatres, Top Golf, etc.)

Regulation	All Other Uses
Development Site Area, Minimum per Dwelling Unit (square feet)	N/A
Front or Street Side Setback, Minimum (feet)	15
Interior Side Setback, Minimum (feet) [2] [3]	10
Rear Setback, Minimum (feet) [3]	15
Building Height, Maximum (feet) [4]	75
Lot Coverage, Maximum (%)	80
Distance Between Buildings Up to Two Stories, Minimum (feet)	10
Distance Between Buildings More Than Two Stories, Minimum (feet)	20

Chicken N Pickle: Pre-application

- Pre-application meetings
 - Overview of project and site specifics
 - Planning process
 - Initial concerns
 - Elevations
 - Parking issues



Chicken N Pickle: Internal & External Reviews

INTERNAL REVIEWERS:

- Landscaping
- Development Engineering
- Fire Department
- Police Department
- Traffic Engineering
- Water Department
- Survey
- Parks & Recreation

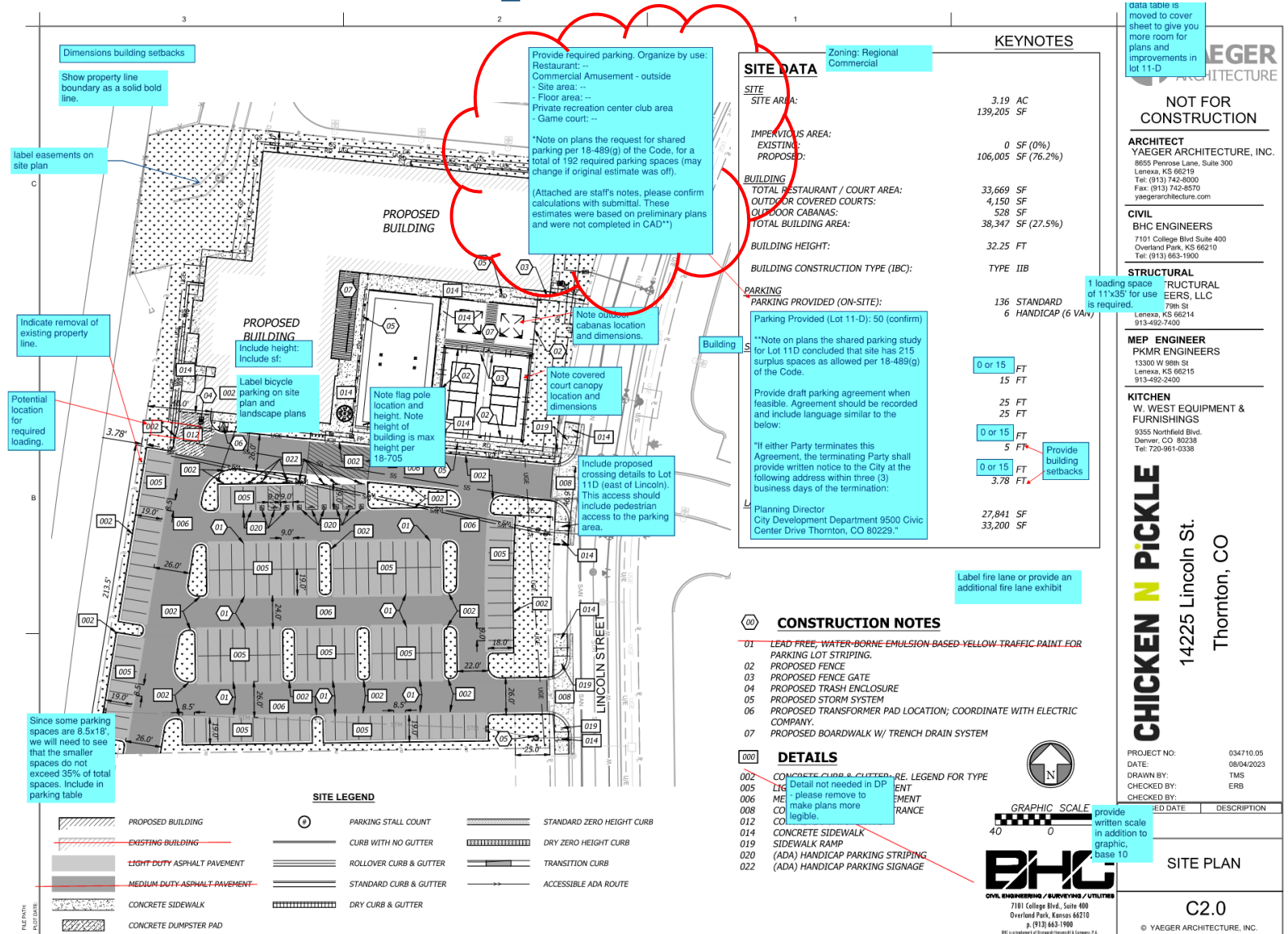
EXTERNAL REVIEWERS:

- Energy Companies
- Mile High Flood District
- Ditch Companies
- CDOT
- RTD
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- Adams County
- School Districts

Chicken N Pickle: Development Review

Development Plan Review:

- Setbacks
- Lot coverage
- Building height
- Architecture
- Landscaping
- Off-street parking
- Lighting



Chicken N Pickle: Development Review

- Required: 224
- Provided: 141
- Could not meet parking requirements for “Commercial Amusement - Outdoor” + “Restaurant (without drive through)”

Provide required parking. Organize by use:

Restaurant: --

Commercial Amusement - outside

- Site area: --

- Floor area: --

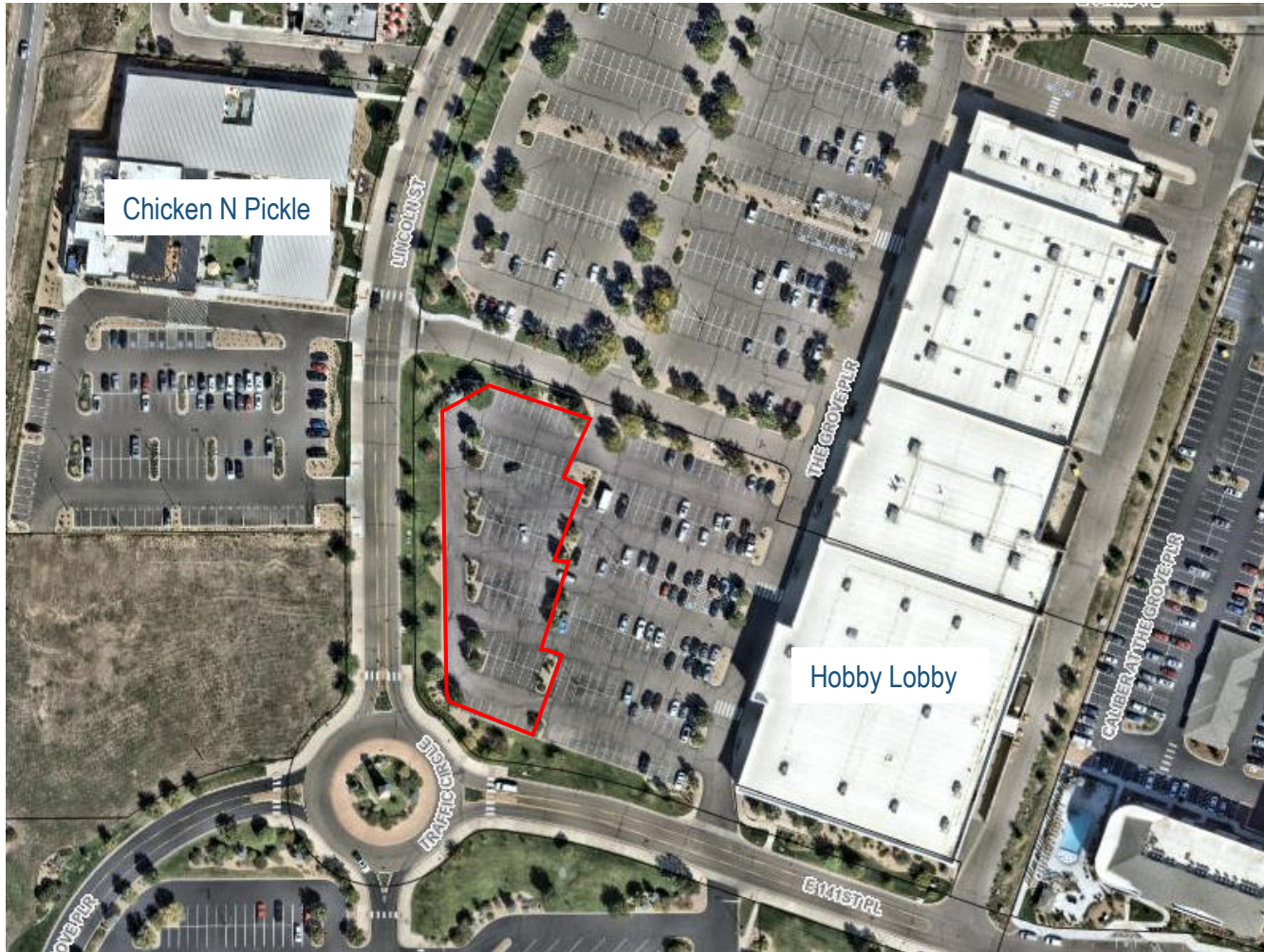
Private recreation center club area

- Game court: --

*Note on plans the request for shared parking per 18-489(g) of the Code, for a total of 192 required parking spaces (may change if original estimate was off).

(Attached are staff's notes, please confirm calculations with submittal. These estimates were based on preliminary plans and were not completed in CAD**)

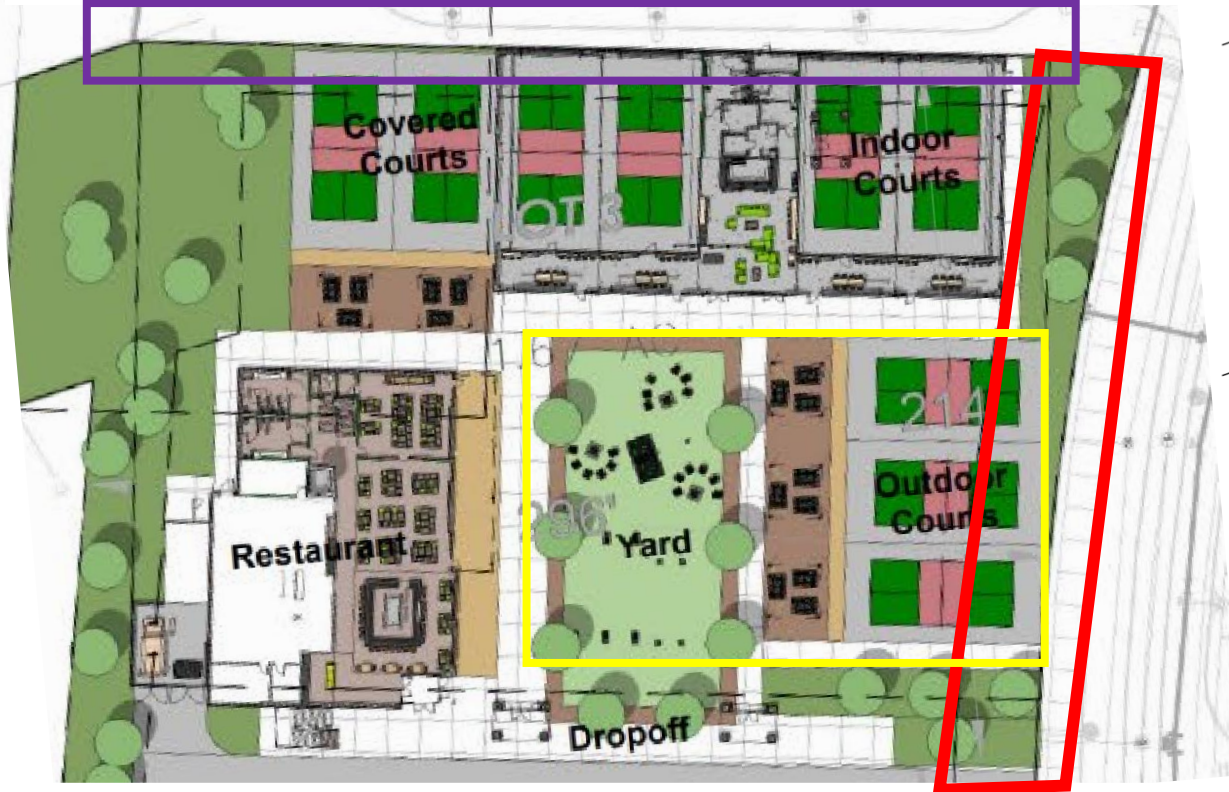
Chicken N Pickle: Parking Study



- Parking study performed
- 20% reduction allowed per code
- 180 total spaces required
- 39 surplus spaces on Lot 11D (Hobby Lobby)
- Shared Parking agreement recorded

Chicken N Pickle: Before & After

Pre-application:



Final Approval:

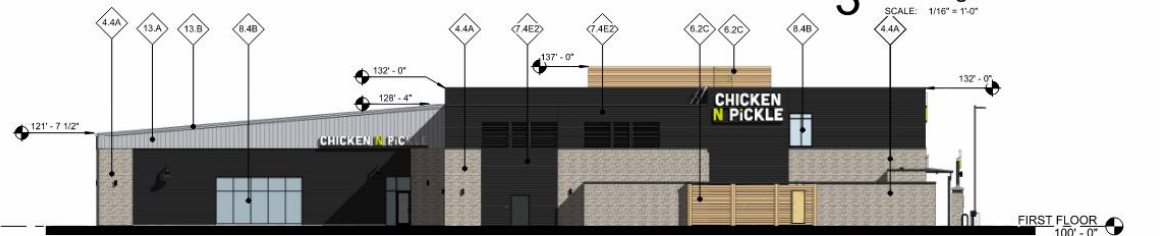
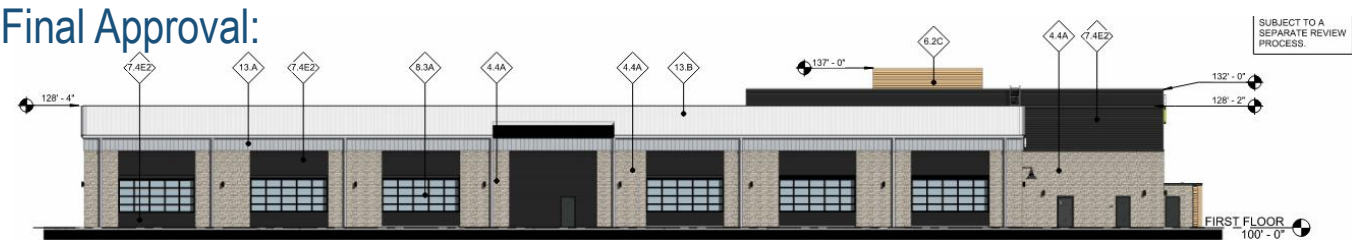


Chicken N Pickle: Before and After

Pre-application:



Final Approval:



Chicken N Pickle: Final Product

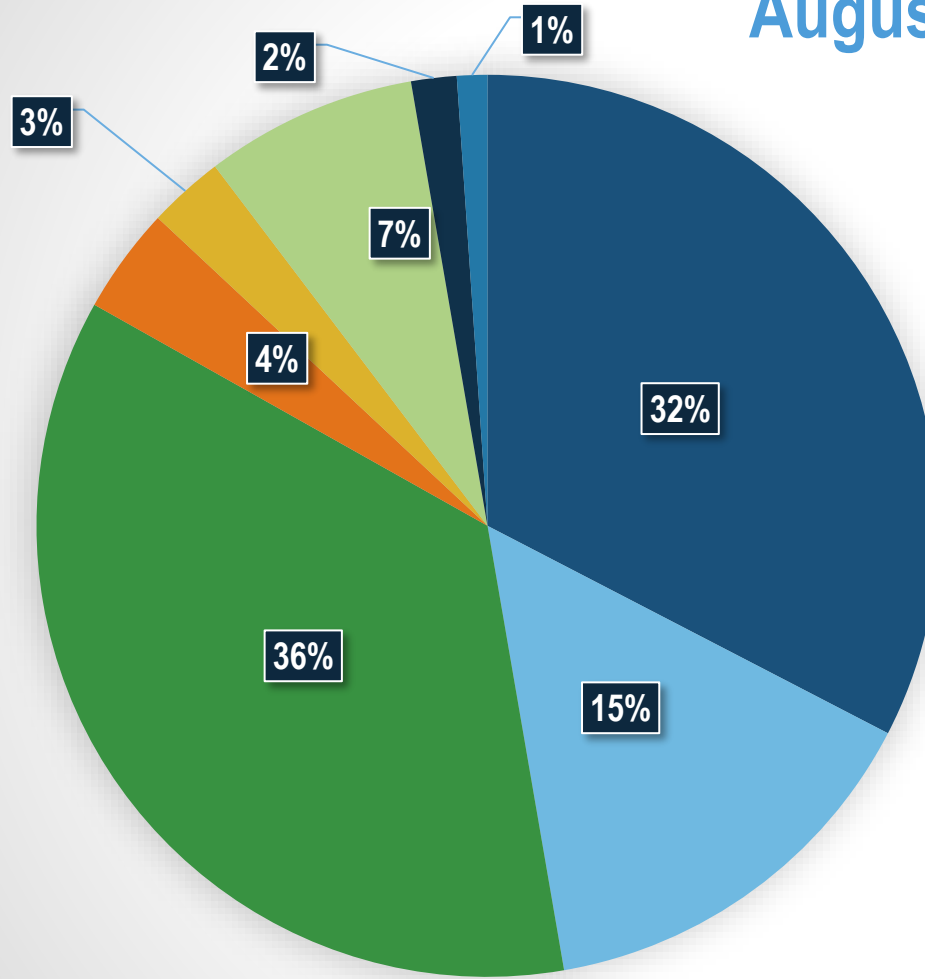


Planner of the Day (POD)

- Common inquiries POD will receive
 - Driveways, Sheds, Decks, Development Status Updates, Zoning, Land Use, etc.
- Setback and Easement locations
 - Easements are reserved for utilities and cannot have permanent structures
- Home Occupations
 - Reviewed and approved per our code standards.
- Business/liquor license
- Open Records Requests

Planner of the Day (POD)

August 2026 POD Request



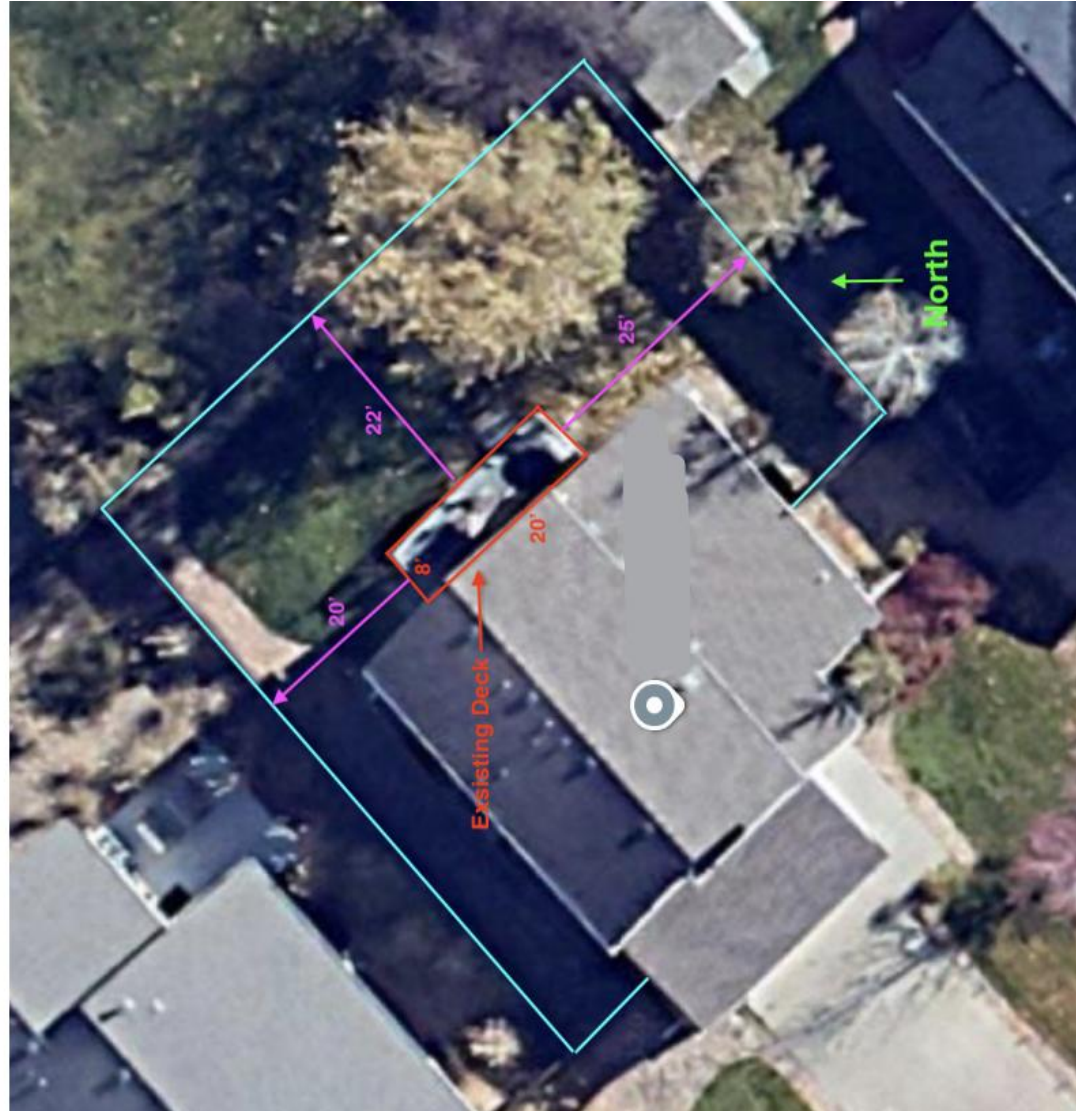
- Desk Calls
- Counter Visits
- Email Question
- My Thornton
- Teams Message
- Minor Planning Permit
- Rapid Review Permit
- Open Records Request

Total Requests: 186

Average per day: 9

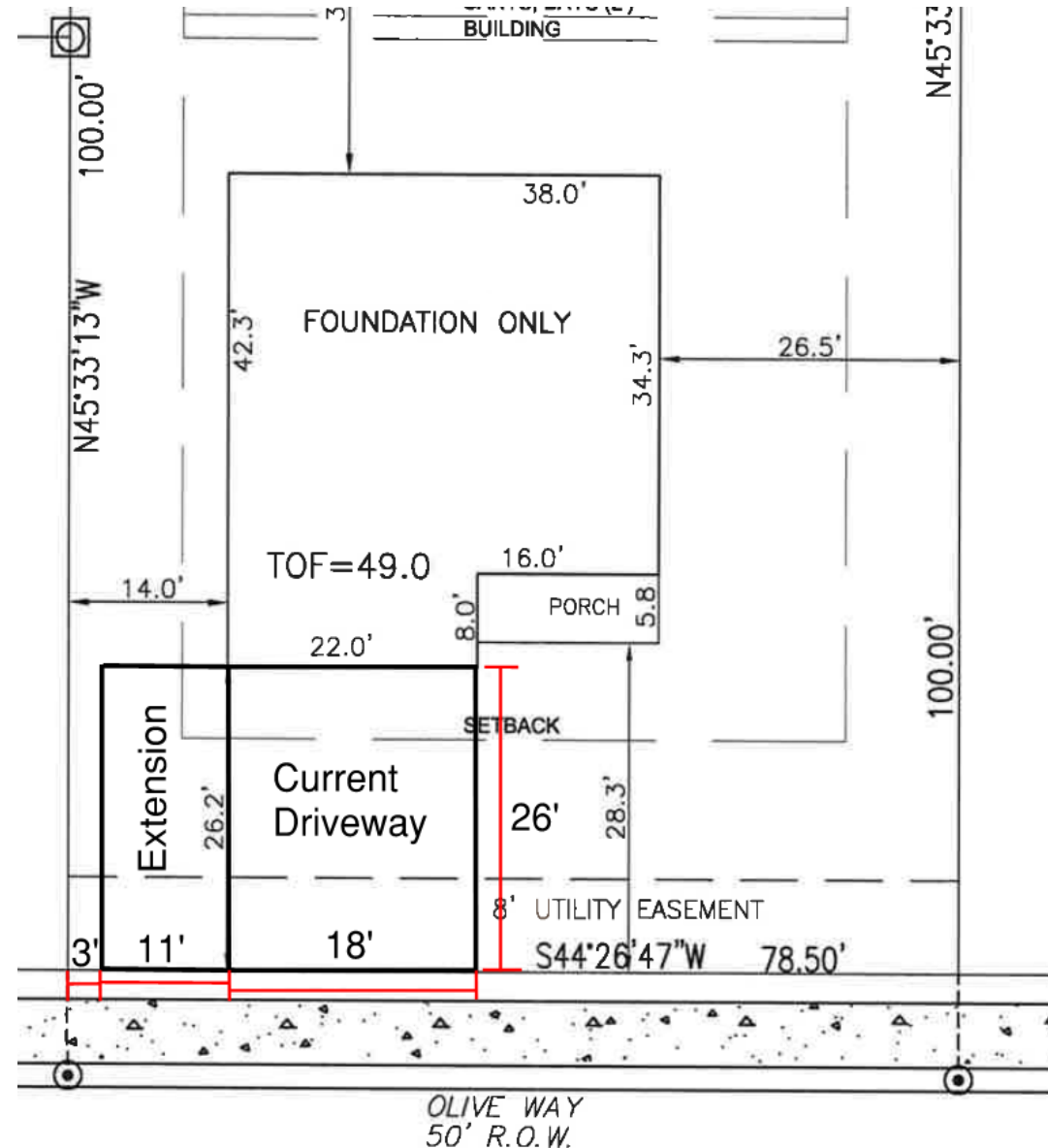
Permit Review Examples

- Permits from the Building Department
 - Tenant Improvements
 - Residential Additions (garages, sheds, decks, carports)
 - Site Plan Review
 - Sign Permits



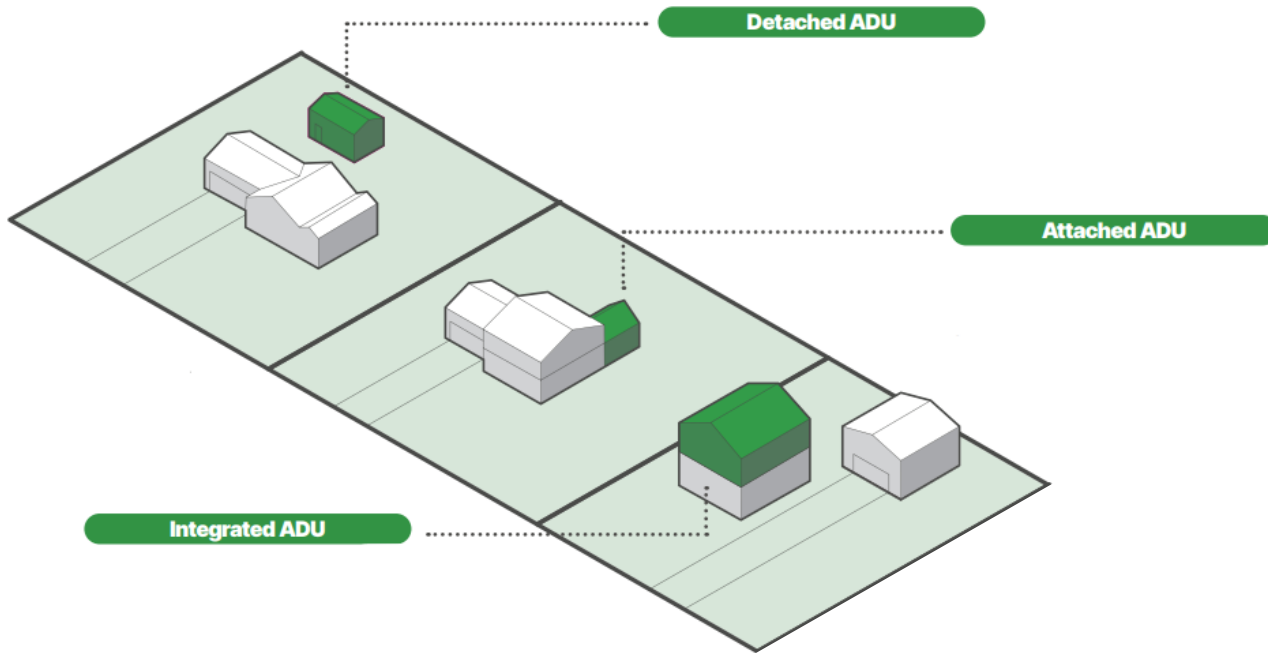
Permit Review Examples

- Minor Planning Permits (MPPs)
 - Driveway Permits
 - Artificial Turf Permits
- Temporary Use Permits
 - Special Events, Sales, Seasonal Markets
 - Reviewed by other departments as well



Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU)

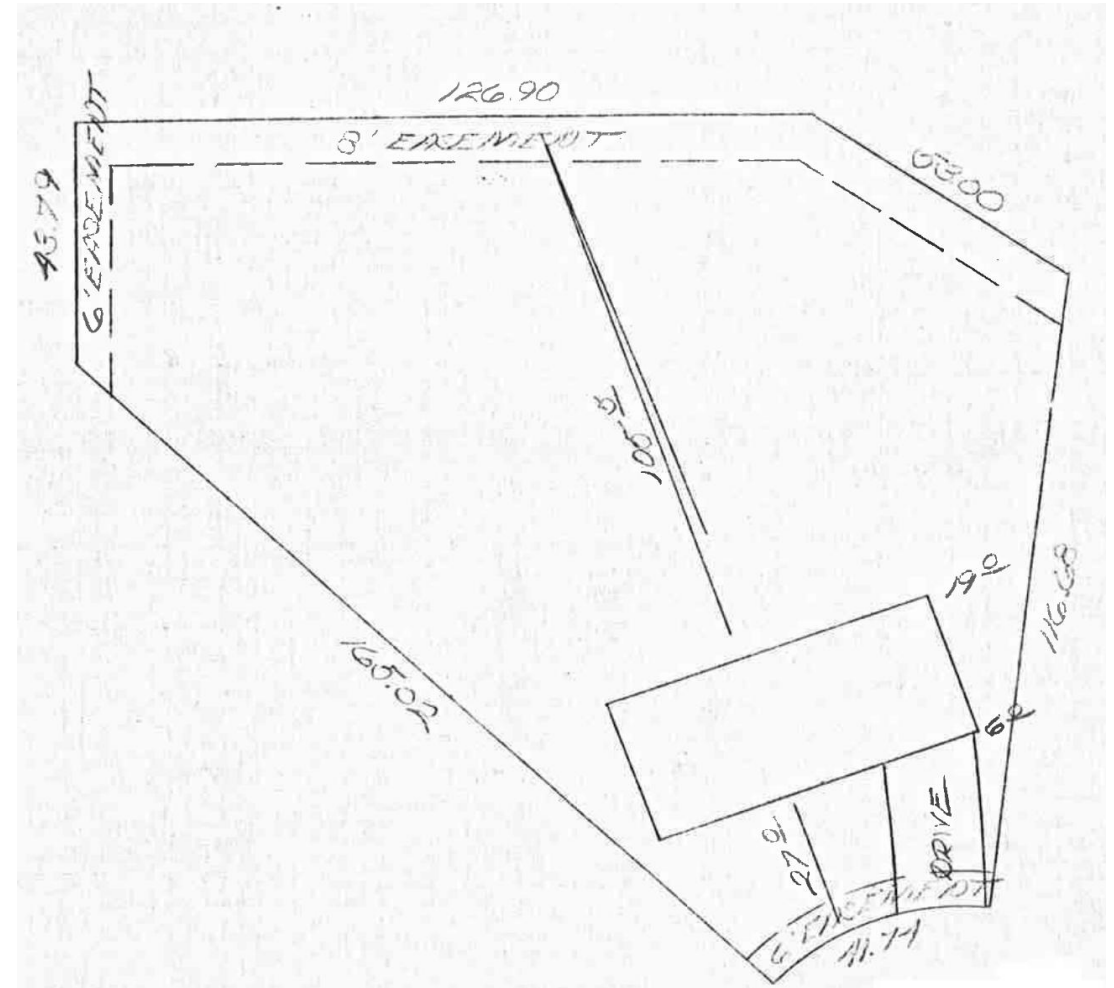
Types of ADUs



- ADU Planning Permit Review
 - Meeting size requirements
 - Compatibility with Existing structure (if not integrated)
 - Has sufficient parking
 - Meeting Setbacks and Easements requirements
 - Lot Coverage

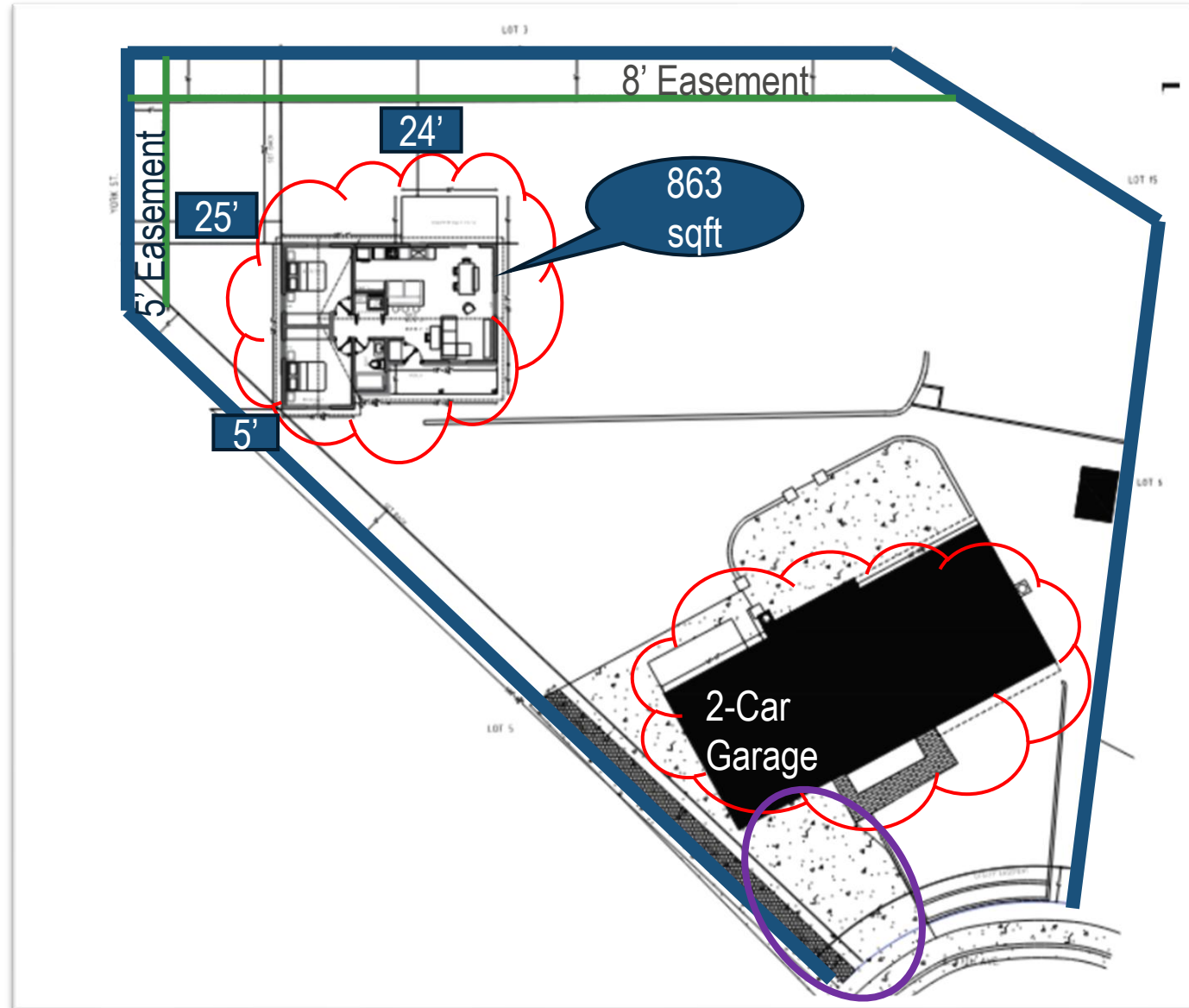
Interactive Activity: Designing a Site Plan for an ADU

- Propose a detached ADU
 - ADU site plan must meet our standards on location and size.
 - Must include what is required per the site plan checklist



Interactive Activity: Example ADU Walkthrough

- Property Lines are shown
- Existing Structures/Buildings are Shown
- Easements are identified
- Check that it has setback measurements
- Square footage of the ADU is included
- Parking Spots are Identified



Interactive Activity: You Design the ADU Site Plan

- Propose a detached ADU
 - Residential – Low Density (RL)
 - Must have a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen, and living space.
 - Lot size: .19 acres, 7,000 sf
 - Existing home size: 1,296 sf
- Resources:
 - Site Plan
 - Development Plan Checklist
 - Zone District information

