October 22, 2019

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to you today to inform you that I am not supportive of the East Central Area Neighborhood Plan as currently proposed. Congress Park is the sixth most dense neighborhood in Denver out of 88. We already are experiencing considerable pressures with growth. Prior to any upzoning efforts, our neighborhood would need additional infrastructure and investments, such as schools, safety improvements, and parks. The neighborhoods affected by the East Central Area Plan are 135-year old neighborhoods, many with diverse housing stock that is both affordable and below market.

The East Central Area Plan and the Colfax Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) will cause significant increase in traffic and congestion on our residential streets even with the proposed bike lane and some crossing improvements. We already have issues with the safety of our residents walking and biking to school and work. Closing two lanes on Colfax for the BRT will shift traffic into Congress Park, which is already experiencing a significant amount of diversionary traffic. There is no mitigation plan for the traffic or congestion in the East Central Area Plan. The plan relies that most if not all people will utilize BRT. The few traffic calming measures are insufficient as compared to the proposed growth outlined in this plan. It is also clear that schools are currently overcrowded in Congress Park. The need for density seems a clear correlation to the possible construction of BRT; however, the city officials have already announced significant delays and financing issues associated with BRT. Furthermore, RTD is currently experiencing a number of financial and operational issues threatening the future of its bus and rail systems. Predicating the plan on proposed transit stops that are decades away may not be a prudent or sound strategy.

The upzoned areas include some of the most dense areas of Congress Park, which lack off-street parking and infrastructure to accommodate additional traffic and impacts. To add as many residents as proposed with the assumption that none of them will have cars is extremely unlikely. Current data suggests otherwise. Thus, increasing density without addressing parking will add to an already problematic situation. Any new neighborhood bikeways should be focused on creating a safe, north-south throughway, which Detroit Street does not. Consideration of adding neighborhood bikeways should be done in transparent manner only after appropriate traffic and site studies to determine traffic patterns and potential usage. We want to minimize user conflicts among cyclists, pedestrians, scooters and vehicles to promote safety. However, we find that the East Central Area Plan’s recommendations fall short of ensuring safety while exacerbating the effects of density imposed by the plan. Currently the plan appears to promote density without investments for mobility and safety that are badly needed now in Congress Park.

I am against the proposed upzoning from lots that are currently zoned 2.5 to 5 stories to 5 to 12 stories along Colfax and Colorado. There is already ample room for developers given the current zoning and available lots for redevelopment. Why not incentivize development without compromising the unique character of Colfax, Colorado Boulevard, 12th Avenue, and the adjacent areas. We want growth, but it needs to be balanced against current and future infrastructure needs and existing density. Unfortunately, this plan does not balance those interests nor provides the dedicated resources to address the results of upzoning.

The character preservation program for certain blocks within Congress Park will allow developers who have disposable income, not residents, additional incentives to “pick at the edges” of our neighborhood, which are historic, affordable parcels within the neighborhood. Partial demolitions are not a preservation tactic, but appear to be a demolition scheme. We want preservation that supports residents’ desires to improve and retain the character of properties via tax credits and other means. The greenest and most environmentally friendly thing that a resident can do is preserve, repair, and minimize any demolition to their home. City policies should be incentivizing sustainable, proven methods that underscore the value of preservation.

The East Central Area Plan encourages triple density in some areas from 12th to Colfax Avenues. From 13th to Colfax Avenues, it will change zoning to multi-family and row houses. The city is allowing Accessory Dwelling Units in all residential neighborhoods. Without some regulation as to size, scale and design for these units, we will substantially increase the footprint and impervious surfaces in our neighborhood, thereby increasing the urban heat island effect contributing to climate change and the potential for flooding.

The East Central Area Plan does not outline how the character of these unique neighborhoods and their affordability will be preserved. In fact, the upzoning strategies articulated in the plan are considered controversial in stable neighborhoods because of the risk of displacement of current residents. The plan does not address affordability in any meaningful way. Denver needs affordable and low-income housing but the East Central Area Plan relies on the private sector corporations to determine who has access to housing. This is not a proven strategy or best practice in creating and sustainable affordable housing stock. It is considered controversial because of its potential to displace current residents, reliance on speculative investments, and likelihood for increasing land values. We want to see investments in affordable and low-income housing managed by public agencies instead of for-profit corporations.

With significant development in our growing city, specifically River Mile, University Hills, Sloans Lake and Loretto Heights redevelopment projects, we feel the East Central Area Plan should be encouraging what is currently allowed along the Colfax corridor and surrounding neighborhoods. The City and County of Denver should continue to work on improving transportation options prior to committing to a plan that has so many gaps and variables. With the addition of more time to discuss and pursue these options, we know the City and neighborhoods can have a plan that is inclusive and sustainable. Therefore, I am requesting that the City provide more meetings, resources, and, most importantly, a minimum of at least 180 days once released in draft form for residents to fully understand and weigh in on the recommendations regarding affordability, safety, density, preservation, mobility, and infrastructure before this proposal goes to City Council.

Please include my comments in your file. Thank you.

Regards,

[NAME]
[Address]

[Denver, CO]