Urban Redevelopment Strategies (URPL 6355)

(Fridays 9:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m., Room 490)

Instructors: Brad Segal and Marilee Utter

Spring 2026 Course Overview (01/04/26)

With instructors bringing more than 60 years of combined experience in the urban economic development field, this class features experiential learning showcasing Denver as a working laboratory for best practices and case studies. We will explore a variety of influences that guide the success and failure of real estate development projects, including market considerations, political realities, financing tools and public/private partnerships. Understanding the business of development will be a focus in this class because the private sector ultimately leads the way in implementing plans and designs. Topics to be explored include:

- An understanding of real estate development principles and economic development finance tools for projects, infrastructure and commercial districts
- The local, regional and national political influences that shape projects and districts
- The physical site constraints and opportunities that shape projects and districts
- The importance of leveraging resources and creating viable public/private partnerships
- The role of private developers, planners and economic development professionals in guiding projects and districts to success and/or failure

Classes will include interactive guest panels and periodic site tours. Readings will be topical and often include case studies from current projects and events. Students will be evaluated on a combination of class participation, critical thinking and projects.

The instructors are seasoned practitioners and consultants in the real estate and economic development fields and principals of firms with national reach, including Progressive Urban Management Associates Inc. and Citiventure Associates LLC. Information on the firms and principals are available at www.pumaworldhq.com and www.citiventure.com.

MURP Curriculum: This course is designed to address the MURP curriculum in several areas, including:

- *General knowledge of planning*: Economic and community development is an established emphasis within the planning profession, perhaps growing in importance in a changing economy. Understanding the translation of best planning practices to what is actually built, however, is another dimension essential to any successful professional in the field. Fundamentals of real estate development and basic principles, tools and best practices for the built environment will be explored.

- *Planning skills*: The class will tap all the basic skills required in planning and extend them to the real estate and development context. Class projects will challenge student's capabilities in research, written and oral communications, and critical analysis of projects and policies. We will utilize existing plans and policies to evaluate the pros and cons of real estate and economic development projects. We will focus on the realities of economic and real estate development policy making by

examining a variety of perspectives, including governments, developers, not-for-profits, and public/private partnerships.

- *Values and ethics*: Development decisions, particularly in the use of incentives, require trade-offs that demand an understanding of civic values and the ethical implications of how decisions relating to public resources are made. We will explore winners and losers in economic development decisions, and, using recent case studies, critique social equity issues and implications.

Assignments and Assessments

- **Mid-Term Paper & Presentation:** The East Colfax corridor is Aurora's original central business district. With Colfax's historical role as a major east/west highway that predated the Interstate Highway system, the corridor housed a variety of commercial uses with an automobile orientation. In recent decades, the corridor has been the central spine for a neighborhood that is the most culturally diverse working class community in metro Denver. For decades, Aurora has struggled with ways to improve the corridor while the area has also experienced a variety of urban challenges.

  In 2025, a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) was created as the latest approach to improve Aurora's East Colfax corridor and the neighborhoods around it. This DDA will be the focus of your midterm assignment. You'll be asked to become familiar with current planning efforts, both in class and through supplemental research. You'll read the Colfax Community Vision and Action Plan, the Plan of Development that was recently drafted to provide general guidelines for DDA investments. Your assignment is to assume the role of the DDA's first executive director, and draft a work plan for the DDA's first year of operation.

  In a paper not to exceed three (3) pages, each student will highlight the following in your work plan: 1) provide your own recommendations on where, how and why DDA investments could be most impactful over the next year; and 2) identify up to five specific actions you will take as the executive director to initiate the program – both internally within the DDA and externally along the Colfax corridor and with adjacent neighborhoods. A companion oral presentation highlighting your work and findings will also be prepared, not to exceed five (5) minutes in duration. (25% of final grade – paper counts for 20%, presentation for 5%)
  - ✓ *Paper and companion presentation due in class on March 20*

- **Term Project, Paper, and Presentation:** The final term project will require students in groups of two to identify and "adopt" a metro Denver new or redevelopment project or a commercial district that is utilizing many of the financing and organizational concepts that are explored in the class. If a development project, it must be site-specific and in the conceptual and/or pre-development phase (not yet built or under construction.) If a commercial district, it should have an existing organization guiding its development. Interviews with project principals such as city planners, private sector developers, designers, and community members are important to project understanding and are expected.

  The report should assume that you are the Lead Planner for the selected project. Your City Council is looking to you to do due diligence and make a recommendation on their approval of the proposed project (or district). Your report should be a stand-alone document for them that describes the proposed project, your analysis, an explanation of why you do or do not support it as presented, and

if not, any modifications you would recommend. Your report can be of any format, but should address the following questions:

1. Who: Experience, quality, and capacity of developers/proposers
2. What: Brief project description and program
3. Where: Location and compatibility with community and region
4. Why: What is the anticipated financial return to the developer (or districts) evidenced by an attached proforma? Risks to project success? Other development considerations?
5. How: Aspects of the project financing, design, outreach, market, etc. that particularly influenced your recommendation
6. Final Recommendation: Do you ultimately support approval or not, and if not, what modifications to the proposal would you seek?

A final paper (up to 10 pages narrative including a proforma analysis plus up to 5 pages of exhibits) and maximum 10-minute presentation to the class will be submitted. (50% of final grade – 40% paper/10% presentation.)

Both the paper and the presentation should be organized to emphasize student understanding of financial tools and proformas, and critical thinking and constructive suggestions about the project itself.

- ✓ *Select project and submit written one-page outline of approach by February 13*
- ✓ *Submit project status report, one-page outline by March 13*
- ✓ *Presentations and papers due May 1*

- **Attendance & Participation/Weekly Discussion Points:** Worth 25% of final grade. 25% attendance and class discussion participation, and bringing up to three brief written discussion points to each class based upon the week's reading and/or immersion assignments ("*evidence of thought*").

Notes on Attendance, Participation & Preparation: There are three components to your attendance and participation grade:

- First, given the experiential nature of the class, attendance is mandatory unless excused for religious holiday, personal health issue or emergency. If you plan to miss class, make sure to notify Brad or Marilee beforehand. Each unexcused class will incur a 2% deduction from your final grade.

- Second, participation is a fundamental part of your experience in this class. Participation does not just mean "showing up", nor does it mean responding to each and every question posed. It means actively involving yourself in the discussion by showing up on time, completing all readings before class, actively listening to who is speaking, asking pertinent and pointed questions, offering opinions respectfully, respecting all other viewpoints and otherwise being "deeply present" in class.

- Third, many of the classes will include presentations from seasoned professionals. It is a matter of basic respect to be prepared for these guests and their topics. Therefore, to demonstrate that you are prepared, we are requiring that students come to each class with up to three discussion points on the week's topic and readings (i.e. "*evidence of thought*").

Given the value of the "real time" learning and interaction with class guests, we will not record class sessions.

Course Outline 1/04/26

	Topic	Guests: Invited	Reading
Jan 23	Introductions/ Intro to Redevelopment	None	Metropolitan Revolution
Jan 30	How Developers Think: Adaptive Reuse & Incentives	Joe Vostrejs, City Street Susan Powers, Urban Ventures	Overview of Real Estate Development
Feb 6	Fundamentals of Urban Renewal and TIF	Tracy Huggins, DURA Brigid Keating, LURA	DURA website; Citizen's Guide to Urban Renewal
Feb 13	Special Districts: When, Where and How	Anna Jones, CLA Tom George, Spencer Fane	APA Planning with Improvement Districts
Feb 20	Downtown Development Authorities/Aurora Case Study	Naomi Lacewell & Ethan Greene, P.U.M.A	Colfax Community Vision & Action Plan
Feb 27	Real Estate Development Fundamentals: Part 1	Mark Tompkins, Strae Advisory Services	Marilee's "Acid Test" APA Pro Forma article
Mar 6	Real Estate Development Finance: Part 2	Mark Tompkins	TBD
Mar 13	Evolution of Public/Private Partnerships	Bill Mosher, City of Denver	TBD
Mar 20	**Midterm – March 20**		
Apr 3	Case Study: Developer Perspectives on Affordable Housing I	Kimball Crangle, Gorman USA (on site?)	TBD
Apr 10	Case Study: Developer Perspectives on Affordable Housing II	Brendan Greene, East Colfax Community Collective	TBD
Apr 17	Case Study: TBD	PUMA Team and Partners (at PUMA office)	TBD
Apr 24	Case Study: Englewood DDA	Hilarie Portell, Englewood DDA; Dan Poremba, City of Englewood (in Englewood)	Englewood DDA website; Downtown Matters Plan
May 1	**Final Project Presentations & Paper Due**		
May 8	Course Evaluation and Feast		

Office Hours: We don't offer set office hours but will make gladly make ourselves available by e-mail or appointment. Often, best times to meet with us are before or after Friday classes.

Other Notes (from the Department…)

Absences, Tardiness and Homework: Except for documented health, religious, family or emergency reasons, we will not accept excuses for absences, tardiness or papers not submitted. Unexcused absence incurs loss of two percentage points, and tardiness counts for half of an absence.

Plagiarism: Students are expected to know, understand and comply with the ethical standards of the university, including rules against plagiarism. Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or words without acknowledgement. The following are considered to be forms of plagiarism when source is not noted:

- ✓ Word-for-word copying of another person's ideas or words
- ✓ The "mosaic" (i.e. interspersing your own words here and there while, in essence, copying another's work)
- ✓ The paraphrase (i.e. the rewriting of another's work, while still using their basic ideas or theories)
- ✓ Fabrication (i.e. inventing sources)
- ✓ Submission of another's work as your own
- ✓ Neglecting quotation marks when including direct quotes

Please visit the UC Denver Writing Center for assistance on plagiarism and on general writing help.

Use of AI Tools: AI tools permitted, but must be credited in all uses, including weekly readings, mid-term, and final projects.

Communication: Unless otherwise noted, we will contact you via Canvas. In addition, syllabi and readings will be posted on Canvas. Since Canvas uses your official school email address (ending with email.ucdenver.edu), please make sure you check this address regularly or have it forwarded to your personal email account.

Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities who want academic accommodations must register with the Disability Resources and Services (DRS) at UC Denver. Once a student has been registered with DRS, DRS will review the documentation and assess the student's request for academic accommodations in light of the documentation. DRS will then provide the student with a letter indicating which academic accommodations have been approved. Once you provide us with a copy of DRS's letter, we will provide any accommodations that DRS has approved.

Health and Wellness: As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, traumas, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. If you or someone you know is struggling, you can find supportive campus and community resources at the Health Center at Auraria or the CU Denver Counseling Center. On weekends, holidays or after-hours you can contact the 24/7 Mental Health Crisis and Victim Assistance Line at 303-615-9999 or text Talk to 38255.