

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This project looks to develop an urban design vision plan of shopping nodes along University Boulevard in Centennial, Colorado. The City of Centennial hired Civitas to study the corridor and develop strategies on how to resolve the lack of economic activity within shopping centers and reinvigorate the corridor. This author is working for Civitas to develop a comprehensive urban design vision plan that addresses these issues and provides ideas for redevelopment. This is a capstone project for the Urban and Regional Planning Masters program at the University of Colorado, Denver.

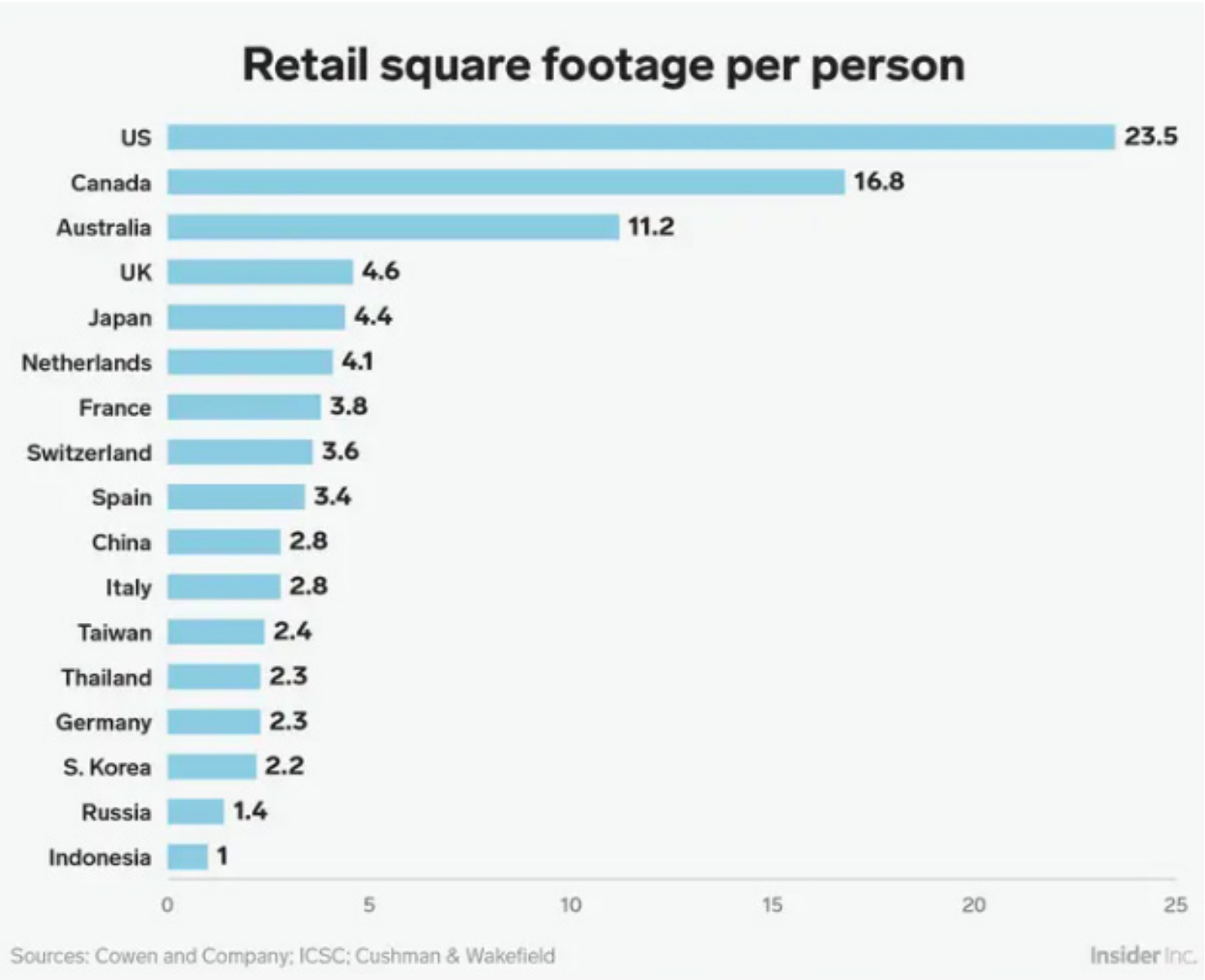
The background research found several important factors as to why retail along arterials struggle economically and brought to light strategies that address those challenges. First, the emergence of the automobile in the 1950's played a significant role in making strip retail along high-traffic, speedy corridors a common urban form in many cities across America. Many municipalities are reliant on sales tax

of retail for their budgets and therefore zoned and encouraged developments of retail to increase their tax base. Like many suburbs in Colorado, the supply of retail has outpaced the demand. This is common in America where retail square footage per person is far larger than any country in the world. This oversupply puts municipalities, like Centennial, in a tough position about what to do about defunct and vacant retail spaces like along University Boulevard.

Strategies to revive retail include placemaking, adding a mix of uses, improving walkability, improving the experience of a shopper, and connecting to green spaces. Placemaking and connecting to green spaces improves accessibility for pedestrians and creates a gathering place for residents to build social cohesion. These strategies help improve the image of a place so that people recognize it and feel like they are somewhere unique, rather than just another suburban shopping center.



University Boulevard Urban Design Vision



A mix of uses, including residential and office, provide for almost 24-hour customer base that improves sales. It also helps in providing more vibrant public spaces since residents and visitors can share in programming and activities that will attract more people to travel to and stay in the shopping center. With e-commerce becoming more convenient than brick-and-mortar shopping, retail must create distinct experiences for people to be attracted to gather and

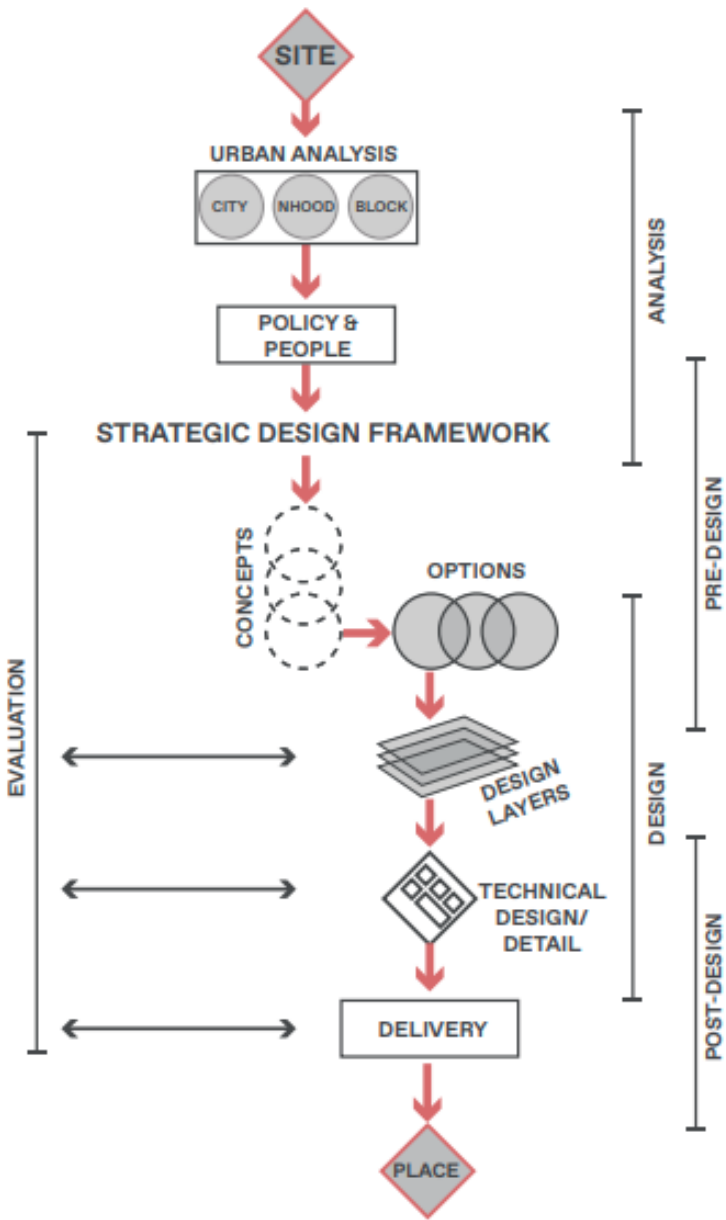
shop. Access into and through the shopping centers for pedestrians gives smaller retail stores that rely on anchors better opportunities to attract customers who are already visiting the shopping area. Walkability improves the overall experience and journey of the shopper. However, there must be high-quality street design with trees, lighting, pavement materials, and other amenities that encourage walking.



The project was based on a methodology by a book named the Urban Design Process which begins with an urban analysis at different scales, develops a strategic design framework, and then develops design frameworks and concepts.

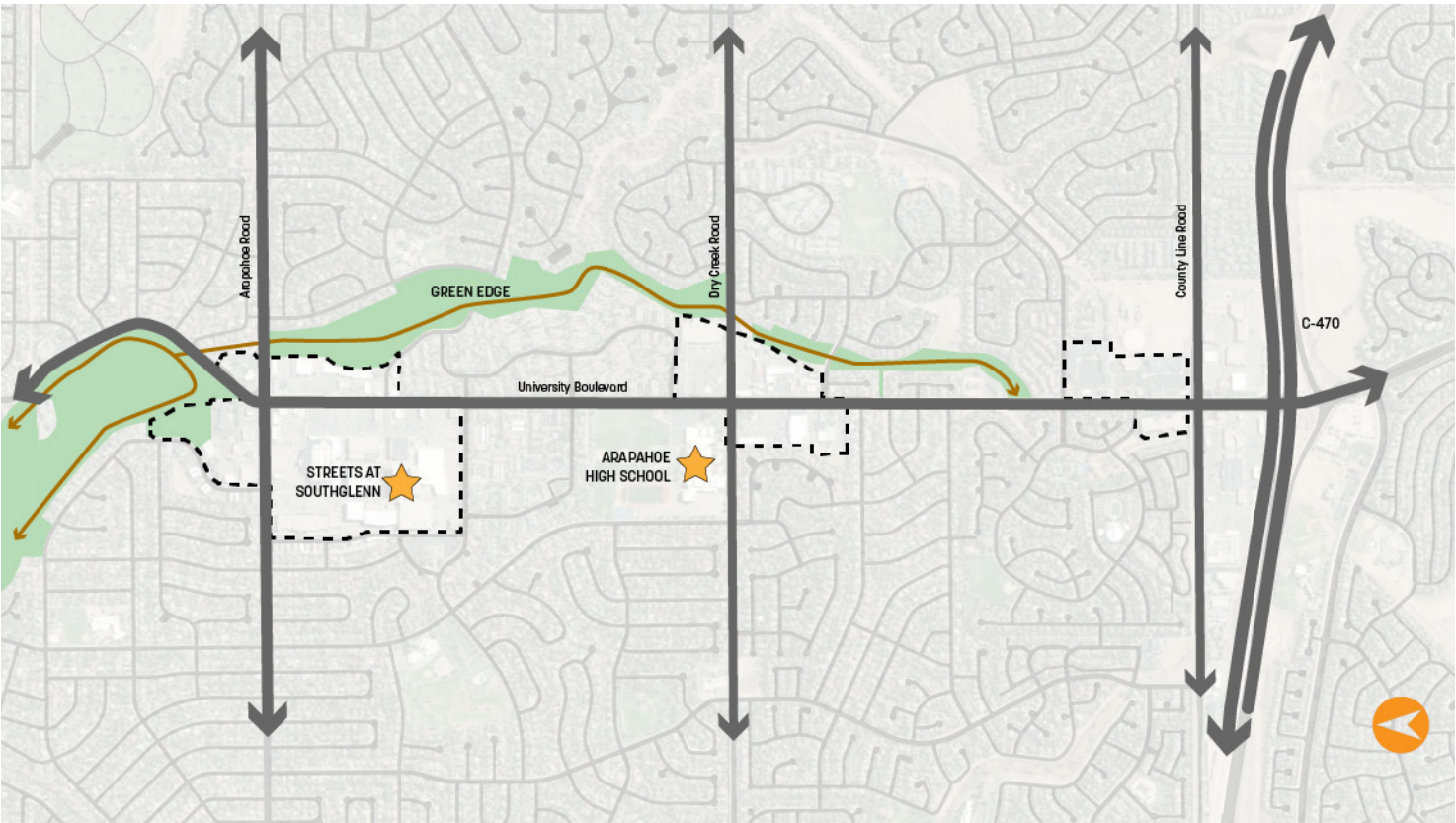
The urban analysis found that there was a north-south greenway adjacent and parallel to University Boulevard that presents a significant opportunity to connect the corridor and the nodes to the green spaces. Also, the Streets at Southglenn has made a name for itself, although it still needs improvement to become a destination for the region. Each node along University is at a major intersection with other arterials. At the north, the Arapahoe Node is at the intersection of University Boulevard and Arapahoe Road. At the middle, the Dry Creek node is at the intersection of University and Dry Creek Road. And finally at the south, there is the County Line Node at the intersection at the County Line Road and University. The challenge with the university corridor is that is a highway owned and operated by the Colorado Department of Transportation which has strict guidelines to keep traffic moving at a fast pace, while forgetting pedestrian and other mobility options. Also, there are many walls and barriers that block access and frontage to University Boulevard, creating an obstacle to a truly pedestrian-oriented corridor.

The vision for the project is to transform the University Boulevard corridor into a premier boulevard that increases access to the shopping centers and adjacent parks systems while continuing to provide regional motor-vehicle access. A new identity



will be established that is recognized throughout the region attracting visitors and providing unique experiences for Centennial's residents.

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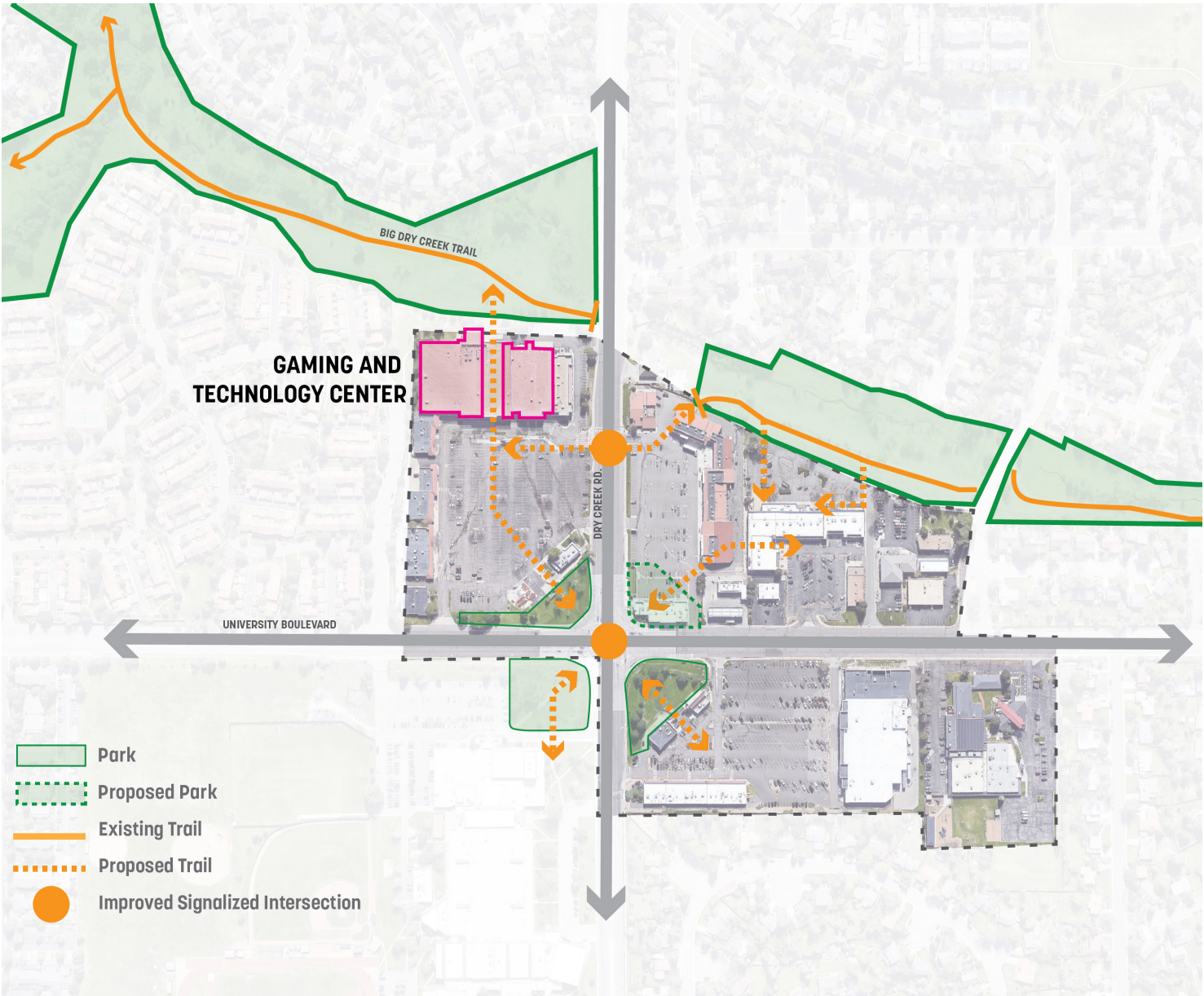


The Dry Creek Node framework and proposals are influenced by the existing characteristic that it serves teens and children with the existing high school, Kids Wonder, Christian school, and children’s music center. To continue this, a gaming and technology center in the north east corner of the node is proposed to provide an after-school and summer programs for young adults, teens, and children. The center will provide online gaming equipment and other technology like

Automated Reality for people to use and learn about technology and how they might find careers in that field. New access to Big Dry Creek Trail and the north-south greenway will provide new connections to greenspace for the node and residents. Signalized intersections will be improved for safer and enjoyable pedestrian access, and the existing park spaces at the corners of the intersection at Dry Creek and University Boulevard will create a unique form that

create an inviting space for residents and visitors. At Dry Creek node, a new town green with placemaking and gathering space is proposed to occupy the existing vacant retail spaces. New trails will connect the green spaces to the nodes, as well as the communities to the west of University Boulevard. An improved intersection at Otero and University that encourages pedestrians to cross University Boulevard

to the trails and the retail nodes. New building facades will create a more attractive space for shoppers that blend the outdoor space with the retail space. The frontage will be designed for activation that is inviting and vibrant. Improved wayfinding within the node is proposed to ensure people are aware of the shopping areas and attract to them to the spaces. Finally, the existing paseos will be improved with art, lighting and used for retail to increase access.



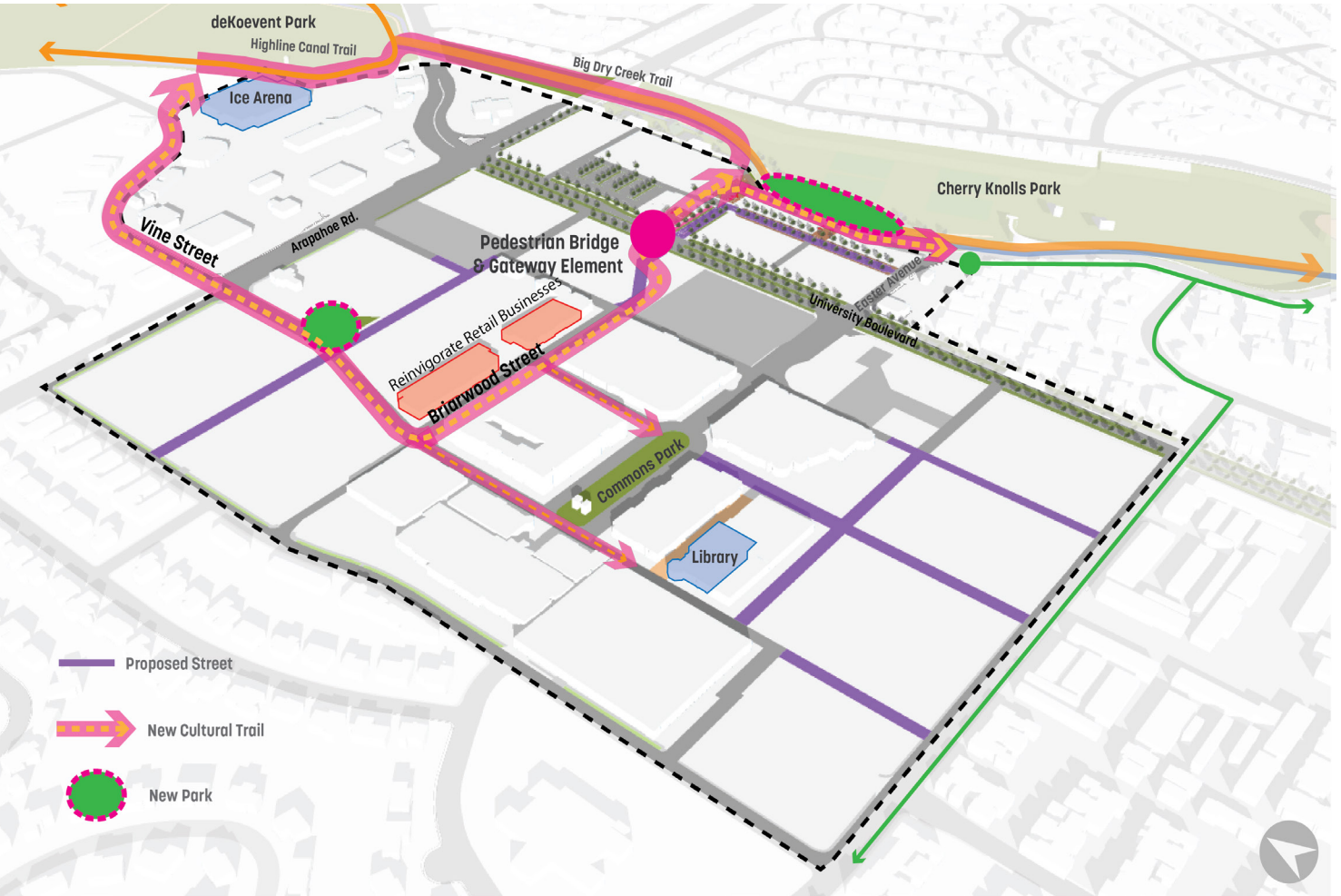
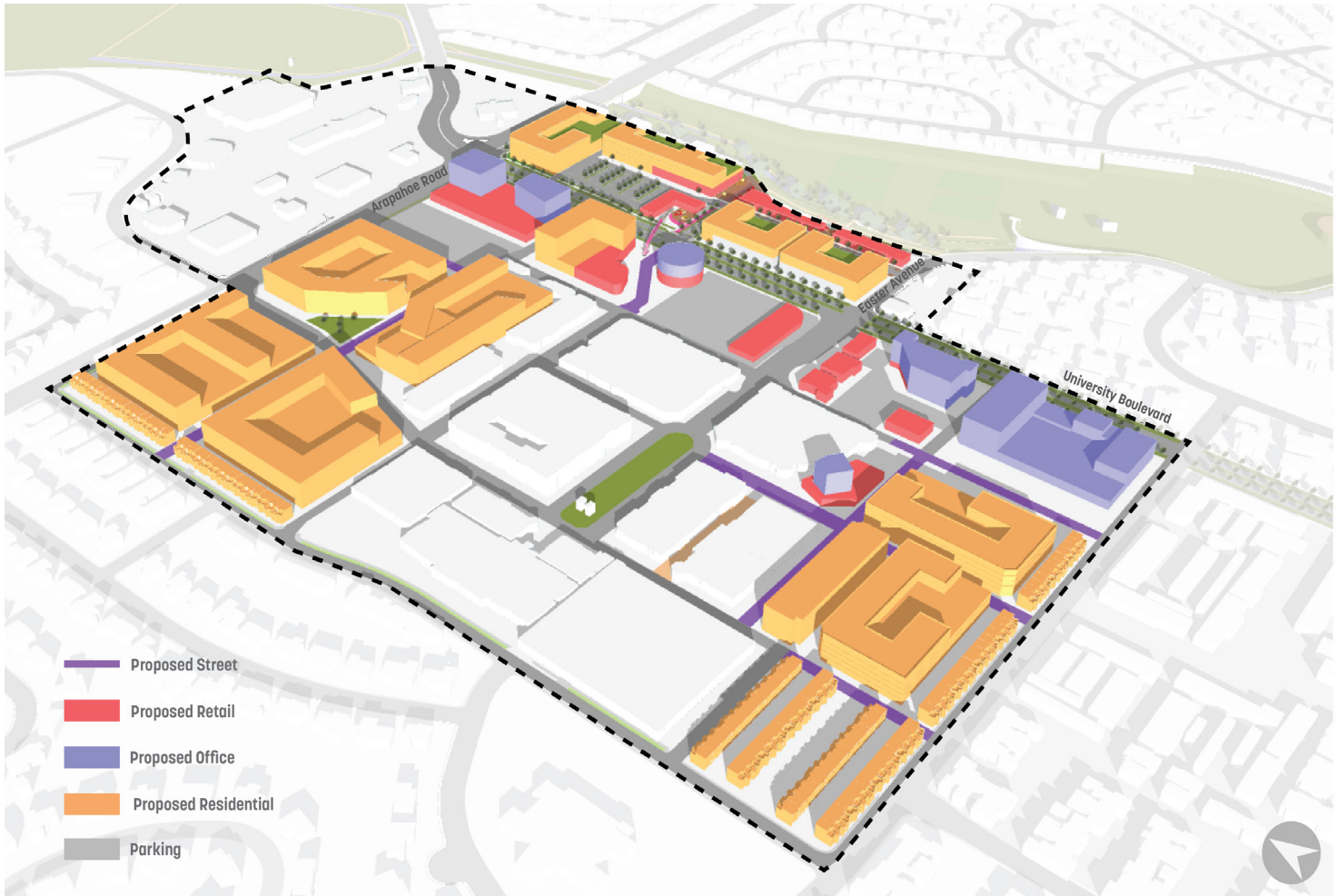
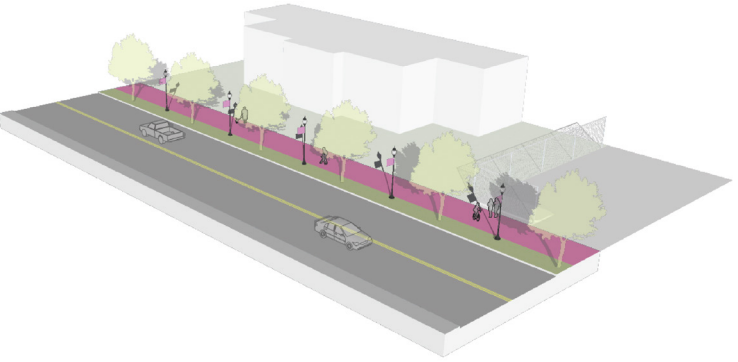
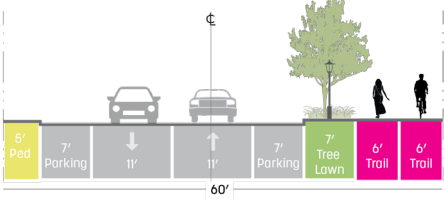
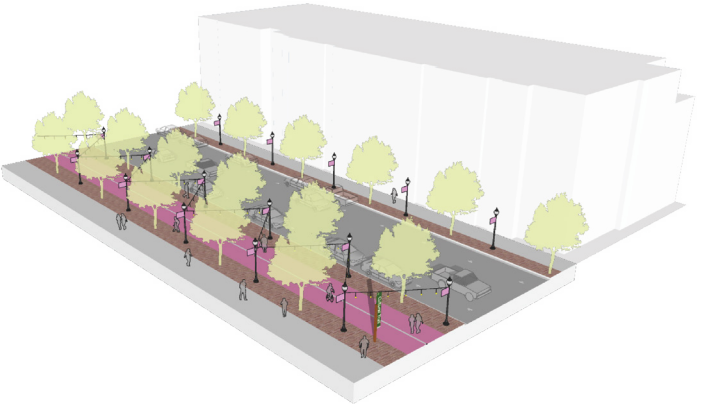
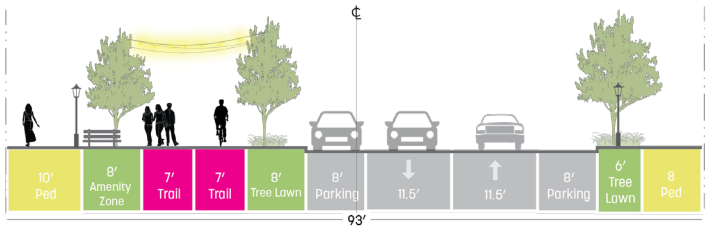


The Arapahoe Node is the most northern node at the intersection of Arapahoe Road and University Boulevard. This node was chosen for further analysis and more in-depth frameworks and urban design concepts. This node has the best opportunities to be a catalyst for further investment and development along the corridor.

The node is proposed to be mixed-use with residential, retail, office, and public space. Most of the residential development will be at the edges to the north and south to the west where existing residential is already existing. This will keep the existing character of the community, but also create a more inviting streetscape for the existing residents to walk into the node and use it as their community space. Office and residential will be along University

Boulevard to lure travelers to come into the node. Proposed streets are organized to continue the grid pattern in the node, but to make the blocks smaller to increase walkability. While commercial is proposed along University Boulevard, the highway will not be a traditional main street because of the high traffic, but will have retail perpendicular to the boulevard for increase visibility of the stores. Parking is proposed to stay where existing grocery stores are located.

A new cultural trail is proposed to connect the node to itself, to the surrounding neighborhoods, and to the existing parks and open spaces. The trail proposes a pedestrian bridge over University Boulevard to seamlessly connect both sides of the highway and to create a new gateway element that provides users a sense of arrival to a distinct and vibrant corridor.





The southeast corner of the node, the Cherry Knoll District, was further analyzed to develop a more detailed design concept of what redevelopment of the node and corridor could be. This district was chosen because it has the opportunity for the most change, especially since the Streets at Southglenn is already known and continuing to be developed by its owners.

The proposal includes a new public streets that pierce the center of the district, where access already exists with a parallel street that connects to Easter Avenue. Easter Avenue is a collector street that runs east-west and connects the western and eastern neighborhoods to University Boulevard and the Arapahoe node. There is an existing signalized intersection at University Boulevard which provides great opportunity for access into the Cherry Knolls district. With this access, the retail will be concentrated to the south of the district to make the experience of visitors a convenient experience. Surface parking will be replaced with parking garages that are wrapped with residential and retail. To create a street

within the district that is vibrant and pedestrian-oriented, active street frontage will be designed.

Less dense development will front Cherry Knolls park to create an ease into more dense development from the single-family homes to the east. Town homes and one-story retail is proposed at the park edge. The existing natural grocers will be encouraged to stay, but within a new mixed-use building with residential and other retail. The existing surface parking lot, improved and shifted a bit, will remain for those customers, and other retail customers. The pedestrian bridge that lands in the center of the district will connect with a new plaza area that provides views of the mountains to the west, and of the green way to the north and south. A new park is proposed between the retail buildings and Cherry Knolls park that connects the two together with a set up trails that follows a terraced park. This concept, while increasing attractiveness for new visitors to shop at the businesses, also gives back to the community with new gathering and recreation places that provide distinct experiences.

