

SMART GROWTH IN ACTION

Highlands' Garden Village Compact Mixed-Use Community

DENVER, COLORADO

When Denver's Elitch Gardens amusement park relocated in 1994, it left behind a 27-acre site just five miles from downtown. On this site, the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) helped facilitate the vision, design, financing, and economic development of Highlands' Garden Village, an innovative, compact, mixed-use community that has become a model for development throughout the Denver area.

Early in the process, design workshops engaged citizens and community leaders in the redevelopment. The resulting neighborhood reconnects the street grid with innovative "skinny streets," comfortable and appealing for pedestrians. To blend in well with existing land uses, commercial buildings and apartments are sited across from existing commercial blocks, and single-family homes front their counterparts in adjacent neighborhoods. The buildings reflect traditional Denver architectural styles, further integrating them into the historic neighborhoods around them.

Despite its small size, Highlands' Garden Village offers a wide variety of home choices—single-family houses, mixed-income and senior apartments, townhouses, live-work lofts, carriage houses, and co-housing condominiums—all built with recycled or recyclable materials. The neighborhood also includes shops, a school, gardens, and community gathering places.

The community honors its heritage by preserving its historic buildings. The historic Elitch Theater will be renovated to create a local and regional performing arts center and cultural hub for the community. The historic carousel pavilion has been restored, with beautiful gardens and walking paths around it. A charter school, the Denver Arts and Technology Academy, will relocate to Highlands' Garden Village to provide a public education option to local families.

The project's innovative design required nontraditional approaches to financing. DURA created an urban renewal district and provided tax increment financing and direct equity investment in the project. The public investment has paid off. Both residential and commercial property values have increased at faster rates in the project area than in the region as a whole. The project has also spurred development on adjacent streets, raising the area's sales tax revenue by 20 percent during a period of regional sales tax decline. The project's narrow streets, higher densities, variety of homes, and mix of uses required new zoning allowances, which the city has since modified and adopted to create its first mixed-use overlay zone.

By taking advantage of its distinctive character and convenient location, Highlands' Garden Village has turned a once-vacant site into a thriving, attractive neighborhood and shown that a small site can give a community a big boost.



SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES HIGHLANDS' INNOVATIVE MODEL

#1	Includes Mixed Land Uses	✓
#2	Exhibits Compact Building Design	★
#3	Provides Range of Housing Types	★
#4	Promotes Walkable Neighborhoods	★
#5	Exhibits a Distinct Sense of Place	✓
#6	Preserves Open Space	✓
#7	Utilizes Existing Development	✓
#8	Provides Transportation Choices	✓
#9	Practices Fair Decision-making	✓
#10	Promotes Stakeholder Participation	★

QUICK FACTS

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