

The need for additional public open green space in the University Hills area

January 15, 2019

To: Councilwoman Kendra Black, Denver District 4; Developers interested in the University Hills area; Other elected and appointed city officials it may concern

From: University Hills Neighborhood Association (RNO), representing nearly 4,779 Denver residents

Dear Councilwoman Black, et. al.,

As elected representatives of Denver's University Hills community, we write to express our full support and strong recommendation for the creation of new open public green space within the north section of our University Hills neighborhood, University Hills North. In this part of our neighborhood there is no park or open space for community gathering or outdoor recreation. Citizens in this part of our neighborhood need a place to be outside and breathe fresh air, push their kids on the swings, and throw the ball for their dog. Our University Hills North community is especially vulnerable as new development increases area density.

We are living in exciting times in Denver. Our city is a beautiful place with flourishing industries. It's a desirable place to be and people are flocking here because of it. Being a place where people want to live and work is an important part of a secure future for our city.

However, in Denver, most of the very real challenges we face are directly linked to our burgeoning population – gridlocked streets, decreased air quality, the housing crisis, alarming pressure on our water resources, the list goes on and on. These very real pressures will continue to grow for Denver and cities around the world as shifting ways of life and subsistence bring more people to city epicenters. We've got to come together and work together to get in front of the challenges we face. Indeed, this is the only way we can ensure that our city remains a healthy place to live far into the future.

Tucked on the far south edge of town, increased density is putting pressure on our University Hills community. Continued population growth is putting pressure on our schools and class sizes, roads and intersections, library, rec center, and open green space and trails.

University Hills North is an especially vulnerable community within our neighborhood. You see, University Hills was built in the mid-twentieth century, during the housing crisis that followed WWII — a time when returning soldiers needed homes to raise their families. Our little homes were made available to these young families (families that still live here today) with the help of funding provided by the GI bill. To this day, our neighborhood is a friendly community made up of little homes and hardworking people.

Nowadays, affluence is quickly moving in to scoop up land and opportunity that exists here. Of course, investment is exciting and it can certainly bring positive change. But, recent development projects in our

area and around the city indicate that proper planning and diligence is not happening. This is hurting our communities.

We want to work with you to help ensure coming changes are good for the people who live and work here. It is important that future development in University Hills increase quality of life — as elements that create a healthy citizen population are also elements that help ensure smart long-term business investment too.

As changes come, let's make sure development is well planned and serves our community. It is important that increased density development also include plans for increased public green space. As we plan new open green space and community gathering areas, let's employ best practices that promote both health and equity.

Study after study proves the positive health, environment, and economic benefits of public green space. For city dwellers especially, parks and open space provide direct physical and mental health benefits. These increased health benefits equate down-the-line to cost savings when it comes to the healthcare of our populations. Furthermore, city parks provide environmental benefit. Open space makes our air cleaner by reducing greenhouse gas effects (Denver is one of the worst cities in the nation when it comes to ozone contamination of our air). Open space and parks also clean our water, by filtering water that ends up in our underground aquifers. And, city parks provide economic benefit too, by attracting residents and businesses and lowering infrastructure costs.

Parks and open space also promote social equity. Communities with common space to recreate and get-to-know-each-other are closer knit, happier, and safer. The very fabric of our community is threatened when developers only offer community gathering space on fancy rooftop lounges. Development concepts like this further stratify communities at the class level, ultimately hurting social equity and reducing healthy interaction opportunity among community members. Certainly we can maintain, and even strengthen, our U-Hills community by planning development that provides open green space and gathering areas.

New development in University Hills North and the entire U-Hills area must promote equity, healthy lifestyle, and opportunity. We look forward to working with you to guide future investment in a way that puts people first.

Thank you for working with us to create a better community for the future of our citizens.

Respectfully,

Members of the Board
University Hills Neighborhood Association