

MASTER PLAN, DENVER CIVIC CENTER CULTURAL COMPLEX

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Location: Denver, CO

Client: The Denver Historical Foundation

Size: 143 acres

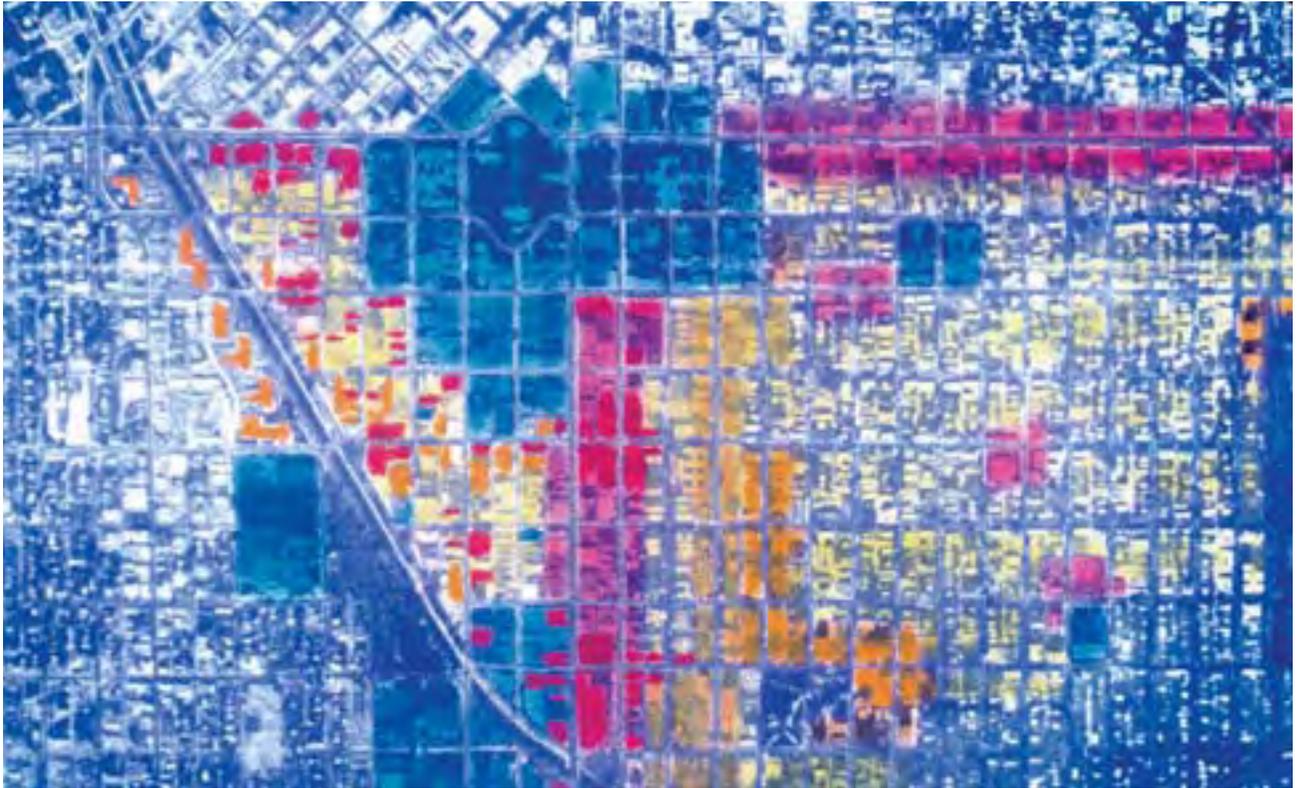
Completion: 1995 (report)

In the early 1990s, the Colorado Historical Society, Denver Public Library and Denver Art Museum, adjacently located in the city's Civic Center, joined in developing a conceptual master plan. Though related by cultural mission and location, there were considerable obstacles: these major institutions had little in common, the potential efficiency and unity of their shared site was overwhelmed by transportation and parking problems, and their public identity as a cultural complex was amorphous. The Civic Center Cultural Complex master plan was intended to define philosophical and design approaches to linking the three institutions in a coherent cultural offering.

The Historical Society, Library and Museum are physically adjacent yet architecturally diverse. They have different owners and differing missions, yet all three control large and complementary collections of Western American art and artifacts. In joining to establish a master plan, the three committed to uniting not only site identity but also programs (including exhibitions and community outreach) and possibly new facilities.

VSBA's planning team facilitated meetings in which personnel from the three institutions came together, some for the first time, to discuss the possibility of a shared mission. Input from the institution's 23-member steering committee, along with a community outreach consultant who brought in other local leaders and groups, informed the plan's recommendations. A "Center for Western American Culture" emerged as a compelling theme, and discussion turned to the activities and physical facilities, existing and future, to support it. Their unusual vision of sharing programmatic goals and physical spaces perhaps heralds the future of many urban institutions.

VSBA's plan focused on the five-block area containing the institutions and their parking, but also addressed a wider planning and design setting. It included proposals for developing the Golden Triangle, a largely vacant district south of Civic Center Park, to support the goals of the Cultural Complex, and explored relationships between policy decisions and physical facilities at different scales.



Land use study



fig. 15 Matrix of Options: Urban Forecourt

The most distinctive urban-design element of the first phase is a shallow, landscaped forecourt, formed in the city-owned blocks immediately south of the institution and defined by an arc one mile in diameter embracing all three institutions. The arc is counterpoint to the orthogonal city grid; by suggesting a broad urban sweep beyond the confines of the Civic Center it unites the Museum, Library, and particularly the Historical Society across spaces now perceived as barriers. The arc's great diameter gives the forecourt a large-scale, civic presence despite its shallow depth. Finely drawn metal "arc pieces" define its perimeter without obscuring the view of the Rockies. With their strong silhouettes and juxtapositions of small and large scales, these are traditional monuments translated in a minimal manner. Light sources within their stone bases will catch colored reflectors at their tops at night to create a multi-scaled lightscape. The schematic design for the arc contains trees and permanent elements that can stand alone as civic sculpture but also act as foreground for future buildings.

Since accepting the plan, members of the Civic Center Cultural Complex have taken the first steps toward implementation. As parking south of the site is developed, the outline of the great arc at 13th Avenue has been established, and the Library's new addition has incorporated design elements conducive to future integration with the Museum. Acoma Plaza and a shared loading bay have been developed following the plan's recommendations. Within the Golden Triangle, several buildings have been renovated for apartments and the first new residential building has been occupied.

