

## **GES Coalition Statement of Rejection to the City of Denver's Claim to an Equitable Development Process for the National Western Complex**

**Statement Issued August 16, 2021**

### **Summary**

The Globeville Elyria Swansea Coalition (GES Coalition), representing residents of these three historic communities, formally rejects the proclaimed 'equitable' process of the City of Denver in regard to the development of the National Western Complex. Mayor Hancock continues to assert that the development of the Complex, and particularly of the area of land known as the 'Triangle', has been conducted in a just and equitable manner. But our community rejects these claims. GES asserts that the process continues a legacy of exploitative development practices, dispossession of land from the community, and false promises from the City of Denver for community-led development.

If the City of Denver wanted to undertake a truly equitable and just process, it would engage with the GES Coalition and community members through a deep partnership, including listening to and incorporating community requests, and repairing previous harms against the community by granting land ownership back to the residents. In particular, GES requests the city advance equitable development by:

- Granting land, previously taken from the communities in the National Western Complex neighborhood, back to the community as part of Denver's long-term development plan.
- Establishing a meaningful partnership with local communities near National Western to give residents decision making power over how their neighborhoods are developed as part of the bond package and any further development.
- Halting the development of the arena and investing those bond funds in health and housing services for the people of Denver, such as housing-first solutions for the unhoused, affordable housing, and job programs.

### **Inequitable Development of Publicly Owned Land**

In response to the lack of action and communication of the City to move forward on a Community Benefits Agreement or Equity commitments for the Triangle, GES established a [community-led development plan](#) that reflects the needs and preferences of GES residents, released in June of this year. Based on an extensive community [survey](#) and expert advice from a renowned urban planner, GES has created next steps for a Community Planning Process detailing how development of the Triangle could proceed in a just and equitable fashion.

However, the City of Denver has not given the time or acknowledgement to our collective work and is bulldozing ahead with the \$200 million bond proposal for the arena and 1909 arena to be funded with taxpayer dollars. The City is aware of the GES alternative, a more equitable and sustainable vision of development for the area, yet continues to pursue an undefined

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development plan that will disenfranchise the GES community, and continue a legacy of displacement and exploitation of low income communities of color in Denver. Only the minimal “community benefits” have been identified without the community's participation and without analysis or evidence that these benefits will even support the community. In addition, the feasibility of the City’s development plan is unclear – the [feasibility study](#) conducted by the City revealed that the new arena and market may prove to be unprofitable, require further residential development and gentrification of the neighborhood, and rely on numerous contingencies to recoup the investment costs.

### **Inequitable Recovery**

While Mayor Hancock’s proposal for the \$450 million bond is framed as recovery for the City of Denver, the feasibility study conducted by the City not only casts doubt on the economic success of the development, but highlights that the recovery is for a select portion of Denver residents at the expense of those currently living in the neighborhoods surrounding the National Western Complex. Many questions remain unanswered around the actual plan for the "Triangle", the NWC commitment to GES neighborhood stability, and the actualization of jobs for GES and other Denver neighbors making it unclear how the City’s plan leads to equitable recovery.

GES demands true equitable recovery that prioritizes the urgent needs of Denver residents in regard to housing, health, and economic stability, as opposed to an unnecessary, and unwanted, new arena. In particular, recovery should prioritize long-term housing solutions for the unhoused and housing-insecure, large-scale investments in rent-controlled and subsidized housing, and investments in job and economic opportunities for the most disadvantaged populations in Denver.

### **Continuing a Legacy of Racism**

The claims of the City to a just and equitable process echo a history of false promises to develop the GES neighborhoods according to the community interests. Despite passing a similar bond in 2017, and Measure 2C in 2015, both of which promised community-led development, the City failed to offer any funding to the community, meaningfully include them in decision-making processes, or repair legacies of dispossession from city development processes.

Government officials now claim the arena and associated public market will advance equity citing details such as the payment of Denver’s new minimum wage – a legal requirement of any business – and the opportunity for customers at the market to ‘round up’ purchases to donate to the Community Investment Fund. Such proposals illustrate the City’s inadequate understanding of equity. Rather than addressing the systemic injustice of development processes, the City offers mere pennies on customer purchases and the already-mandated legal minimum wage.

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Additionally, the City is now offering token efforts to include the community, such as by hosting advisory meetings in the neighborhood, providing notification to residents regarding construction, and mitigating dust to minimize the nuisance of construction – construction on land taken from GES residents. Residents are looking for far more than construction notices and dust mitigation.

**An Opportunity for Equitable Development and Equitable Recovery**

To further develop an equitable planning process, GES Coalition has retained nationally celebrated urban design firm HECTOR, winner of the MacArthur Fellowship, in order to complete a community-directed ‘neighborhood-ization’ plan for the public land at “The Triangle.” Additionally, GES Coalition also published an Equitable Development Planner [here](#). The city continues to exclude both the ‘neighborhood-ization’ plan, and Equitable Development Planner from all discussions regarding development of the National Western Complex.

Thus the GES Coalition rejects any claims by the City of Denver to an equitable and just development process. For the City of Denver to truly invest in equitable development and equitable recovery, it would deliver the stated requests of the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods:

- The granting of land, previously taken from the communities in the National Western Complex neighborhood, back to the community as part of Denver’s long-term development plan
- The establishment of a meaningful partnership with local communities near National Western to give residents decision-making power over how their neighborhoods are developed as part of the bond package and any further development
- Halting the development of the arena and investing those bond funds in health and housing services for the people of Denver, such as permanent housing solutions for the unhoused, affordable housing, and job programs, as well as completing unfinished infrastructure projects promised to these communities over the last decades.

Until the City of Denver, including City Council members and Mayor Hancock, meaningfully engage with GES regarding these requests, GES rejects any claims by the City that the development of the National Western Complex has been conducted in a just and equitable fashion.