

**Urban Land Institute** | Health Leader Network



# Walking Audit

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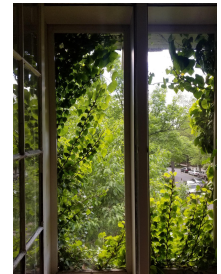
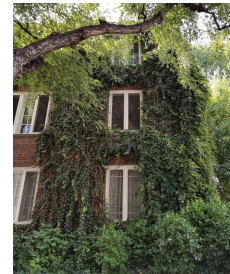
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## Neighborhood Context

My apartment is located on the outer periphery of the historic Capitol Hill neighborhood, adjacent to Cheesman Park. I conducted the Walking Audit within a 4-block radius of my apartment. In the spring and summer, the ivy grows wild and nearly covers all my windows, as if my building is trying to swallow me whole. I love it. I conducted this audit on November 20th at 2pm in the afternoon.

I live in an **active neighborhood** and I consider myself very lucky to live here. If I had to describe it in three words, I'd say it is **walkable, green,** and **serene**. In venturing around the neighborhood, I often see people from all walks of life, especially near the more commercial areas southwest of my home, an activated areas that includes a King Sooper's, small gym, tailor, Starbucks, liquor store, and historic church.

My street serves as a boundary between **multi-unit dwellings and registered historic mansions**, dating back to the early days of Denver's mining boom. Interestingly, during the 1800's, there was an economic bust in the booming silver mining industry that greatly influenced the morphology of the Mile City. Many mansions were converted to multi-unit dwellings to house **a transient middle class**. The unique character of Capitol Hill has reflected this period ever since. It's a picturesque melange of ornate mansions, expensive condos, and iconic apartment buildings with names like 'Ramon' and 'The Segovia.'



## Health Elements



A healthy aspect of this neighborhood is that it is great for **active living**, although there could be more bike lane infrastructure connectivity. Nevertheless, we do have bike lanes! Living here has drastically reduced the amount of time I spend in a car because my neighborhood is **walkable** and **well-connected** to **multimodal transit** options, such as bus transit stops, bike lanes, and B-cycle stations. The street pattern utilizes a rectilinear geometric layout with narrow streets and slow speed limits that detract from the car hierarchy, making walking the preferred mode of transportation. In conducting the audit, I saw numerous people out and about, walking, skating, or riding their bikes.

Another healthy aspect of Capitol Hill is the **diversity of land use**. This area is predominantly zoned **residential** and is complemented by hints of **commercial** uses that are dispersed throughout the neighborhood.

A third healthy aspect of the neighborhood is **access to food**. There is a grocery superstore three blocks from my apartment that provides food for the neighborhood. The superstore attracts customers from **various demographics**, providing a spectrum of **commercial food products** typically found in most superstores, in addition to **sustainable/organic products** for the ecological, health-minded consumer.

Another healthy aspect of the Cheesman Park/ Capitol Hill neighborhood is that it has **high exposure to nature**. There is a large amount of **shade trees**, which helps lower temperatures during the hot summer months. The **urban tree canopy** provides many ecosystem/health benefits in providing shade and mitigating the **urban heat island effect**.

The **salutary effects of nature** on population health outcomes in the urban context fascinates me. Fortunately, this neighborhood is highly exposed to the **healing power of nature**. The Denver Botanic Gardens are located on the easternmost side of Cheesman Park and are a delightful **community amenity**. As Denver's largest park, Cheesman Park is both an active/ and passive recreational space, attracting a diverse range of park-goers. It is a great space to relax, contemplate, and gather.



**Access to a park is a right, not a privilege.** Yet in frequenting Cheesman, the lack of diversity is evident.

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## Health Challenges

**Affordability** is a major challenge in Denver. Highly-priced rental rates and **exorbitant costs in purchasing** reinforce Denver's housing crisis. The surge of the housing market is driving people to the suburban periphery. While it is very 'healthy' neighborhood in many regards, unfortunately there is a **facade of equitability** that does not accurately represent the diverse demographics of Denver.

People living in older homes and **historic buildings** like those in this neighborhood may be exposed to various **environmental toxins**. For example, **poor air quality** is an established regional health concern. At-risk populations, or people with **respiratory issues**, may experience compounded symptoms if living in a home that contains **asbestos, lead, old plumbing, or cracked chimneys**. Even though this part of town has many trees that improve air quality, it is certainly a health issue to be considered.