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# Cherry Creek could tax residents for extra features, but some push back

Supporters of creating a General Improvement District say the city won't fund certain amenities Cherry Creek residents want. Opponents say they don't need anything if it requires paying more.

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Attendees walk through the Cherry Creek Arts Festival on Saturday, July 5, 2025. (Michael Braithwaite / The Denver Gazette)  
Michael Braithwaite / The Denver Gazette

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Denver's Cherry Creek is full of modernist mansions, historic Victorian homes, bungalows — and soon — Waldorf Astoria condos. Now a new effort is looking to see if the area wants to be organized and taxed in the same way businesses in Cherry Creek North are.

The neighborhood is in the early stages of forming a General Improvement District, also known as a GID.

A GID is a public-private funding tool that would put an extra tax on residents to cover improvements the city doesn't provide, such as private safety patrols, cleaning or additional beautification projects.



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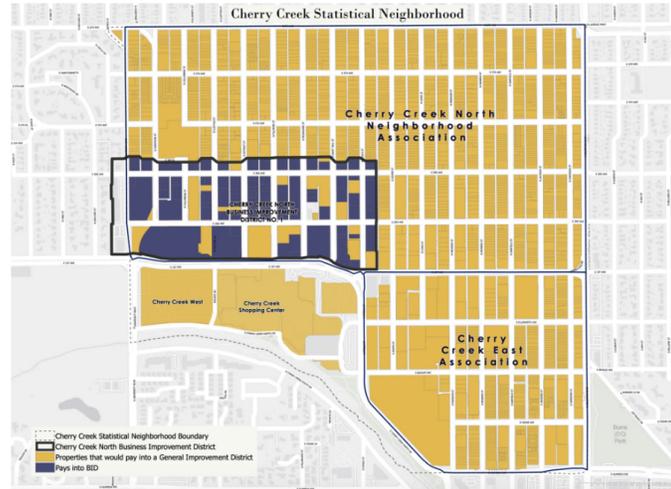
RiNo leaders vote to renew business district, consider 'alternative' structures



The neighborhood already has a special district that has helped transform it into one of the most coveted markets in the region: The Cherry Creek North Business Improvement District.

But the BID is limited to the 16 blocks it covers and only taxes businesses in an area that is becoming increasingly residential amid its current development boom.

The GID's proposed boundaries have looked at the Cherry Creek statistical area, including the Cherry Creek North and Cherry Creek East neighborhood associations, and officials are also considering including the area between Cherry Creek Drive and Alameda Avenue known as the Cherry Creek Triangle.



A map of a proposed General Improvement District for Cherry Creek. The area south of Cherry Creek Drive, known as the Cherry Creek Triangle, is also in preliminary talks to be considered.  
City and County of Denver

The idea to expand the benefits, and the costs, of the business district to the residents has already sparked pushback from homeowners, who feel like a GID is being pushed on them and it would be unnecessary. They also worry the idea would help fund Cherry Creek's new developments that they don't believe residents shouldn't be responsible for.



"As much as maybe some of us like these things, I don't need it," said Dana Busch, a decade-long resident of Cherry Creek. "I don't need my property taxes increased. I don't like what's happening."

The idea has inspired Busch and former City Councilman Wayne New to lead a formal initiative to stop the GID, planning to create a website and knock on doors of neighbors to advocate against being taxed.

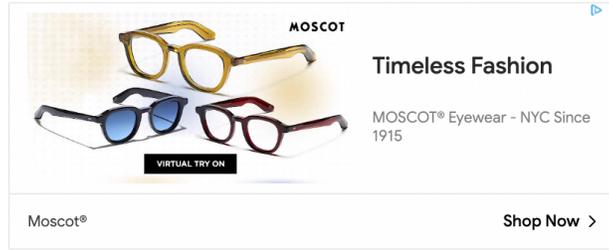
Meanwhile, advocates for the GID said there's a [lot of misconceptions spreading](#) about the effort and the idea is still not fully formed enough for people to make clear judgements on what it would fund yet.

"Uncertainty is confusing, it's scary," said Councilmember Amanda Sawyer, who kickstarted the process of creating a GID. "Introducing a concept is very different from introducing a plan. And we're not introducing a plan."

After gathering community feedback, she said creating a plan would be the next step in the process.

### Extra tax causes concern amid city's financial struggles

Busch and New first heard about the district idea through a postcard in the mail.



As they filled out community surveys and attended community meetings, they said they got a growing sense they were being forced into a plan that would require them to pay more in taxes.

Denver is [facing a \\$200 million budget deficit](#), pushing the city to lay off workers and cut back on spending.

As Cherry Creek is one of the largest tax generators for the city, the residents wondered if this is a city plan to get them to voluntarily pay more for a 10-year term.

Sawyer denied the accusation.

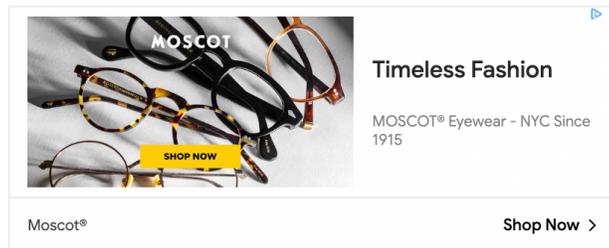
“Our whole thing is that it seems as though there's a bigger agenda by the city to, quite frankly, use this as a way to make up for some of the financial shortfalls that are going on,” Busch said.



GID opponents Dana Busch, left, and former Denver City Councilmember Wayne New stand in James Manley Park on Thursday, July 10, 2025. (Stephen Swofford, Denver Gazette)

[Stephen Swofford/Denver Gazette](#)

While no business plan has been set yet, GID leaders are exploring a mill levy set between three and five mills.



A home valued at \$1 million could pay between \$190 and \$317, [a city website on the GID said](#). A \$3 million home could pay between \$592 and \$987.

Commercial properties outside of the BID, which will not be double-taxed, could pay

thousands each year.

Sawyer explained she agrees the city has under-invested in Cherry Creek for a long time, which she said is a separate issue from the GID.

“All economic business principles point to you wanting to invest dollars in your revenue driver to continue it being a revenue driver,” Sawyer said. “And so it doesn’t make any sense to me why we fail to invest in Cherry Creek the way we do as a city. That is a mistake.”

But the GID’s focus is to “provide services that the city is never going to provide anyway,” she added.



FILE PHOTO: Elway’s closed its Cherry Creek location before construction began on the proposed Cherry Creek West development project. (Stephen Swofford, Denver Gazette)

[Stephen Swofford / Denver Gazette](#)

## Where did the idea come from?

Taxing districts first started popping up around the U.S. in the 1970s to help commercial neighborhoods compete against the rise of shopping malls. Due to its private ownership, malls had more control over services, such as private security,

The thought was if everyone chipped in through an extra tax, everyone can also reap the benefits of private amenities and attract customers back to downtowns or shopping hubs.

Cherry Creek North was the first business improvement district to be established in the state of Colorado in 1989 in response to fears that Cherry Creek Shopping Center and its big-box stores would hurt small businesses in the area.

There are now 12 business districts in Denver alone.

But business improvement districts are limited to taxing commercial properties, as its name implies.

“We’re certainly proud of what we’ve done here in the Cherry Creek North Business Improvement District. But that’s the extent of our responsibility, and that’s by statute,” Nick LeMasters, president and CEO of the BID and on the advisory committee to the councilmember on the GID.

The community has voiced more needs than the BID can provide, he said.

“We were all pretty set on the idea that funding was not going to be coming from the City and County of Denver,” LeMasters said. “So, the GID seemed like a logical method.”

As commercial areas in Denver have become more mixed-use, GIDs have become increasingly popular.

There are currently five GIDs in Denver with the [addition of Ballpark](#) last year. [Broadway is also working toward establishing a district](#) to include the corridor’s businesses and the residential properties along Lincoln St.

A GID was first mentioned in Cherry Creek’s 2012 Area Plan as a potential funding tool to help finance public projects, such as improving 1st Avenue and Speer Boulevard or building bike connections for the Cherry Creek Greenway.

By state law, special districts are not allowed to cover the cost of services the city provides, such as police, snow removal or trash pickup. But it can speed up public projects or finance more amenities than originally proposed.

When the city was investing in Brighton Boulevard, it funded a majority of the \$30 million project but the [River North GID helped support it](#) with \$3 million.

[This business district helped fund RiNo’s growth. Its renewal sparks pushback](#)

It wasn’t until last year when the councilmember started to consider a GID.

After Denver went through redistricting, Sawyer’s District 5 took over the Cherry Creek area and she sent out a survey to gauge the wants of the community she now represents.

What she found was residents desired many things the city couldn’t cover, Sawyer told The Denver Gazette in a phone interview.

More than half of residents said they would want more street lighting in residential areas, security services and enhanced sidewalks for a question asking people to rank what services they want in addition to city responsibilities.

“Since it’s my job to figure out how to get the residents what they say they want, I started looking into it,” she said.

It pushed her, she said, to hire Jamie Giellis, a formal mayoral candidate and consultant who has been part of several district formations from RiNo to Ballpark and soon Broadway.



PREV



NEXT

The GID is currently undergoing a feasibility study, the first phase in the creation of a special district, which Giellis and Sawyer are looking over the results to determine if they should move forward before it's released on July 22.

The process can take about two years, as the district and its budget has to go through City Council approval after a public hearing and a special election where voters will get the final say.

When the survey for the feasibility study was first released, upset residents spoke out on the framing of the questions.

Several residents questioned Giellis and Sawyer at a community meeting in May, asking them why the study's survey was prioritizing how their money should be spent over if the tax district idea interests them at all.

It wasn't until the last question when they were asked whether they wanted to be part of the district or not.

"It should have been the first question," Busch said.

Who wouldn't want extra lighting or security, Busch explained. The question should be who is willing to pay their own money for it?

Giellis said the purpose of the study is to gather large amounts of information with a broad stroke — including both if people want it or what they would fund — over a general area before determining what the district would look like.

After collecting the data, then she said she can go in with a "surgical approach" to determine the structure.

So far, leaders said they plan to move forward to the next step.

Sawyer said results show there's no real consensus and people want to see a more tangible plan before moving forward.

Despite some residents advocating against it, Giellis said the feasibility study's preliminary findings show "it's not a clear no."

"There's a lot of nuance to that I'm working through," she said. "It's also not a clear yes, but I wouldn't expect it to be at this point where there aren't firm details, right?"

"That, to me, signals that there's still conversations to be had, and it's worth further

exploration,” she said.

After the study, Giellis and a team of community stakeholders would look into determining what needs to be financed, how it should be structured, what the exact boundaries would look like and how much to tax residents.

A business plan has to be formed before it goes before City Council for approval and a special election.

“I’m not in the business of forcing anybody to do anything that they don’t want to do,” Giellis said. “Ultimately, this is a democratic process.”

For Busch and New, they said they believe their voices aren’t heard and the idea is being pushed on them.



FILE PHOTO: Motorists can be seen on E. First Avenue and Detroit Street in Cherry Creek.

[Mark Samuelson/Denver Gazette](#)

## Booming developments

The district formation is coming at a time when Cherry Creek is quickly changing due to its popularity and development projects.

The area has become one of the most coveted parts of town for retailers and corporate offices, bucking regional and nationwide trends that have hit downtown Denver especially hard.

It’s also home to some of the most notable real estate sales, with houses selling for several million dollars amidst a cooling market.

And a slew of new developments means more residential properties will be built within the business district.

[Cherry Creek remains hotspot as development slows around Denver](#)

Sawyer’s first survey showed residents were concerned the area was turning into a new downtown Denver and construction was impeding the quality of life.

While Cherry Creek’s existing district doesn’t include the Cherry Creek Shopping Center and its development of Cherry Creek West — since it was created to compete against the site — the GID’s proposed boundaries could potentially require the huge tax generator to opt in.

The major development sparked loud pushback from residents worried about potential traffic congestion and increasing density.

There's a concern residents will have to pay to boost infrastructure to support developments like Cherry Creek West, something New said should be a developer's responsibility.

"The main thing — it shouldn't have to be a GID," he said. "We don't have to have a GID to make improvements."

But Sawyer said creating a GID would give residents the choice to tax the mall and its development by including it in the perimeters.

East West Partners, the developers behind Cherry Creek West, declined to comment for this story.

Giellis also said she's looking into how the mall and Cherry Creek West's revenues could fund the GID.

#### [Cherry Creek West project sparks density, traffic concerns](#)

"One of the things that we heard early on was there's a desire for the mall to financially participate in things that would serve everybody and would address some of the issues or challenges that come to the neighborhood because of it there," Giellis said.

GID leaders also stress it's a misconception that residents will be paying for amenities for other parts of the neighborhood.

GIDs can be divided into zones that could restrict tax dollars from one zone subsidizing another, such as limiting Cherry Creek North's taxes funding Cherry Creek East's neighborhood or vice versa. For example, downtown's business district concentrates its services closer to 16th Street, where buildings on the thoroughfare pay more into the BID.

Giellis said it's not uncommon for GIDs to spark a reaction but that some of the pushback is causing confusion.

"Denver as a whole feels somewhat tax-burdened and there's a lot going on right now. So, I think that's normal," she said.

Part of the process is determining what works best for the community. After a conversation with a resident, Giellis said she's looking into how a fixed-rate structure could work instead of a mill levy that can change based on the assessed property value.

For the residents against it, they just want their neighborhood Cherry Creek North to not be considered at all.

“We want our residential area pulled out of the GID. If the GID wants to go on, if they want to do it, that’s fine,” Busch said. “We do not need to be pulled into this.”

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