

Aurora mayor glad community college developing parcel

Translate

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BusinessDen

Since taking office in 2019, Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman has been waiting for this real estate listing.

"This would be the second largest redevelopment project in the history of our city, the largest being the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, which closed in 1996," he said.

Earlier this month, the Colorado Community College System put out a request for proposals for the redevelopment of its 145-acre campus in Lowry, which straddles the border of Denver and Aurora. The Community College of Aurora and Community College of Denver both have classes onsite.

Roughly 80% of the 18-building campus is in Aurora, which has been the source of much heartburn for the mayor.

"I think the Colorado Community College System has been a horrible partner for the city — up till now," Coffman said.

On a map, the campus looks more like a large field with a few buildings than a contiguous development. Many of the structures are boarded up and sit unused. The area was previously a portion of the Lowry Air Force Base, which closed in 1994.

The lack of development irked Coffman, who said he first reached out to then-system chancellor Joe Garcia in 2020.

"To have boarded up buildings, basically a blighted condition in this city, for something that could be so great, such a great asset, and help stabilize the neighborhoods around it. Instead ... it hurt the neighborhoods around it in Aurora," he said.

"This is such an insult to the city from my perspective as a mayor."

Coffman said Garcia wasn't receptive to doing much with the system's sprawling campus.

"Garcia was just arrogant," he said. "He would always blame it on me. He would blame it on the city. He'd say, 'Well, look at your neighborhoods on the other side.'"

Well, that's right, there's some neighborhoods in difficult positions, but in part because of what's happening here."

Coffman publicly pushed the state entity to sell its property over the past couple of years. The 30-year deed restriction requiring it to be used only for education and vocational purposes expired in 2024.

"I mean, the most they do is mow the weeds here," Coffman told Fox31 last year. The community college system declined to comment about its stewardship of the property.

Note

"Rather than revisit differing perspectives on the history of the property, our focus is on the opportunity ahead and working collaboratively with the City of Aurora, City and County of Denver, and other partners as we consider the future of the Lowry site," it said in a written statement to BusinessDen.

The relationship between the mayor and the community college system remained rocky until Garcia stepped down in June 2025, and was replaced a few months later by Marielena DeSanctis. Coffman said she was a breath of fresh air compared to the previous leadership.

Coffman said he first met DeSanctis for lunch at Stanley Marketplace, where a decade ago, the former aircraft ejection seat manufacturing factory was converted into a market hall.

"I wanted her to see what redevelopment and revitalization can be," he said.

Coffman characterized the new relationship between the two as "very productive." While he isn't formally involved with the selection of the developer and its master plan, Coffman said he hopes whatever gets built will be something high-density. He said that "an incredible mix" of uses is what he desires.

"I think density produces more opportunities for revitalization," Coffman said.

The community college system, for its part, is keeping an open mind toward what it wants to see from the site, according to Karlen Beitman of real estate firm JLL, which is assisting the state in negotiations.

The RFP submission deadline is Nov. 16, and a winner is anticipated to be selected in February. The state anticipates relocating all of the on-campus operations, including those of the community colleges of Denver and Aurora, into nine of the site's 145 acres by 2028.

"The system is focused on selecting the most qualified developer who can unlock the full potential. This is a legacy asset that's going to benefit both Aurora and the Denver communities for decades. So prescribing any uses upfront is not the role that [the system] is taking," Beitman said.