

# ARIA DENVER

DENVER, COLORADO

*Growing and selling food on site to promote health, social intersection, and youth job training*

## LESSONS

- Setting aside space for food production in a residential or mixed-use development can support increased access to fresh, healthy produce for area residents while enhancing project marketability.
- Innovative partnerships among real estate developers, nonprofit organizations, private philanthropy, higher education, and community institutions can produce a development with a set of shared priorities focused on improving health outcomes.
- A food-growing space can be the centerpiece of a development; associated programming and job training services can facilitate community social ties and create a sense of ownership over food assets for community residents.

## QUICK FACTS

### Location

2861 West 52nd Avenue, Denver, CO 80221

### Project type

Mixed use

### Development team

Urban Ventures LLC and Perry-Rose LLC

### Project cost

\$80 million

### Project size

17.5 acres (7.1 ha); 400 total residential units planned; 30,000 square feet (2,787 sq m) of commercial space

### Project status

Anticipated completion in 2018

### Lender

Kirkpatrick Bank

### Equity partner

Not applicable

*This page: Aria Denver includes a mix of housing types, with a goal of encouraging social interaction and multigenerational living. (Urban Ventures)*

*Next page: Residents at Aria Denver have access to organic produce that is grown on site. (Mariel Beaudoin)*



**ARIA DENVER** is an infill community designed with a focus on the health of its residents and the surrounding neighborhood. Aria is being developed on a 17.5-acre (7.1 ha) site that was formerly home to the Marycrest Convent in North Denver. The development contains a 1.25-acre (0.5 ha) production garden, a greenhouse, and various other features to accommodate access to fresh produce. Because Aria is located on a major regional corridor, Federal Boulevard, that cuts through lower-income areas, improving access to healthy food benefits the community overall.

Codevelopers Urban Ventures LLC and Perry-Rose LLC have built 72 affordable rental apartments and 13 townhouses; 450 homes in total are planned, including 28 for-sale units of cohousing, where residents actively participate in the community's design and operation. The project will see future commercial development, potentially including a grocery store.

## Features and Innovations

- **1.25-acre (0.5 ha) production garden:** A full-time farmer from UrbiCulture Community Farms is responsible for growing organic produce on a plot at the center of Aria. Residents and other volunteers also participate in gardening and associated community events. The garden receives funding from a Colorado Health Foundation grant, with plans for it to be financially self-sufficient at the end of the grant period.
- **Pay-what-you-can farm stand:** Residents of Aria Denver and surrounding neighborhoods are able to purchase produce grown on site at any cost they can afford.
- **Permaculture pocket gardens:** Seven gardens allow residents to learn about "permaculture," a system of sustainable gardening practices.
- **1,800-square-foot (167 sq m) greenhouse:** Local nonprofit organization Groundwork Denver runs an on-site greenhouse that can produce up to 10,000 pounds (4,536 kg) of food annually; 75 percent of all produce is sold to local restaurants and Regis University, while the other 25 percent is donated for affordable sale. The greenhouse is run as a social enterprise and is tended by youth employees 14 to 18 years of age.
- **Shared kitchens:** Shared kitchens are being constructed in the cohousing component of the development, which allow meals to be shared by residents from a variety of backgrounds.
- **Health care services and nutrition education:** Aria is part of a partnership known as Cultivate Health, which also includes Regis University and surrounding neighborhood groups, with support from the Colorado Health Foundation. The initiative will offer cooking classes and healthy eating courses for community residents and local students. The adjacent Regis Neighborhood Health Clinic will offer primary care services; providers will not only write "traditional" prescriptions, but also prescriptions for fruits and vegetables.



*“People want to be part of a larger story. The production garden at Aria Denver grants residents access to fresh produce and facilitates social interaction through a variety of classes and community events. On top of that, it makes a positive difference in terms of the marketability of the project.”*

Susan Powers, President, Urban Ventures LLC

## Creating Value: People, Planet, Profit

Susan Powers, president of Urban Ventures, explains the value proposition behind Aria Denver, stating: “It is a sound investment to set aside land for food growing within the context of residential and mixed-use projects. The production garden at Aria Denver sits on over an acre of land—enough space to accommodate additional townhomes. But by ‘giving up’ this developable land, we gained the opportunity to work with a variety of partners and volunteers to create a true centerpiece for the neighborhood.”

Aria Denver’s on-site greenhouse further supports the project’s health, social engagement, and environmental sustainability goals through a mutually beneficial relationship with local nonprofit Groundwork Denver.

Wendy Hawthorne, the executive director of Groundwork explains, “In a city like Denver where land is becoming scarce, this may be the most sustainable path forward for urban farms. Groundwork Denver benefits tremendously from not having to purchase the land where our greenhouse and urban farm are located, and Aria residents benefit from access to fresh, affordable produce, as well as social interaction with neighbors and our youth employees.”

Aria Denver’s integration of fresh food access, active living, and community engagement and outreach programs shows how food-based amenities can produce placemaking benefits while fostering partnerships that seek to intentionally improve health outcomes.