

# DENVER ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TASK FORCE

## *REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY*



*A JOINT INITIATIVE OF  
THE MAYOR OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER,  
DENVER CITY COUNCIL AND  
DENVER OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*



**DENVER**<sup>®</sup>  
THE MILE HIGH CITY

**April 2009**

**City and County of Denver**

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



We all know the City and County of Denver to be a thriving community with a vibrant economy and unparalleled quality of life. Our city is in many ways the envy of cities around the nation. However, we cannot be satisfied with the benefits of our success. Too many of our residents face precarious, and yet in many cases preventable, economic conditions. This is of concern to all Denver residents because the financial struggle of even a small percentage of our citizens diminishes the long-term economic potential of our entire community. Indeed the challenges associated with economic self-sufficiency and prosperity must be shouldered by the community as a whole.

In February 2008, we called upon a select group of diverse and knowledgeable community representatives to help the City address these issues pertaining to individual economic self-sufficiency and prosperity. This collection of citizens, known as the Economic Prosperity Task Force, worked for more than a year discussing and analyzing dozens of topics that affect the social and economic lives of our residents. At the conclusion of their service, the Economic Prosperity Task Force submitted five recommendations to the Administration, the City Council and the City at large. If we as a community embrace these recommendations, we can materially change the lives of countless Denver residents.

We are tremendously appreciative of the dedication and enthusiasm of the Task Force members, City Council and all of the citizens who have contributed to this process. We look forward to continuing to support the efforts of the task force as the focus moves from recommendations to implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hickenlooper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John Hickenlooper  
Mayor

## FOREWORD

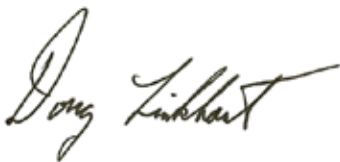
We are pleased to present this report containing the final recommendations of the Economic Prosperity Task Force for enhancing the prosperity of Denver residents and strengthening our city's economy. These five recommendations aim to create transformative, systemic change by leveraging existing resources, implementing innovative initiatives that require minimal funding, and coordinating efforts in order to maximize efficiency and improve effectiveness.

In the current economic recession, there is an urgent need to develop strategies through which local government and its partners can improve the economic stability and security of our residents and business community. At the same time, we recognize that, regardless of economic conditions, it is important that we create an economic environment that offers opportunities for advancement and a safety net that enables people experiencing hardships to quickly return to self-sufficiency. We believe that our local economy will become stronger and more secure by growing our own talent, workers, and businesses, and this in turn will create even more opportunity for economic growth for our fellow residents.

Throughout a year of monthly meetings, representatives from businesses, non-profits and government engaged in a comprehensive examination of economic conditions, structural issues related to the ability of people to make a living, and the effectiveness of existing public assistance and financial empowerment programs. Following much discussion, our diverse set of stakeholders put forth five actionable recommendations to remove systemic barriers, improve opportunities for Denver residents to achieve financial success and increase our community's overall potential for economic prosperity.

We are committed to acting upon these recommendations immediately. We have generated a plan of action to ensure that the Task Force's hard work results in real change, rather than just a report that sits on the shelf. We will develop clear standards for measuring progress and assigning accountability, and are committed to maintaining the resolve to follow through. We look forward to engaging the broader community in implementing these recommendations and we hope that you will take part in this effort.

Sincerely,



Doug Linkhart,  
Councilman-at-Large  
Denver City Council



André Pettigrew, Executive Director  
Denver Office of Economic Development

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Economic Prosperity Task Force co-chairs, Doug Linkhart, Denver City Councilman-at-Large and André Pettigrew, Executive Director of the Denver Office of Economic Development, would like to thank the members of the Economic Prosperity Task Force for their participation and commitment to generate recommendations that will increase economic opportunity for Denver residents and strengthen our economy. The co-chairs would also like to thank the many guest speakers and expert panelists who brought valuable experience, information and perspective to the Task Force's discussions.

This work would not have been possible without the support of the Mayor's Office and Denver City Council, both of which helped set the stage for this effort by making Denver's economic prosperity and residents' financial health a top priority. Mayor John W. Hickenlooper called upon a wide range of community representatives to form the Task Force. City Council members Charlie Brown, Jeanne Faatz, Paul Lopez and Chris Nevitt participated as members of the Task Force and provided valuable input and representation of their constituents.

We are grateful to the Denver Foundation, the Denver Urban Renewal Authority, the Downtown Denver Partnership, and the Piton Foundation for generously assisting with operating costs. Happy Cakes Bakeshop kindly donated cupcakes that helped fuel our discussions.

The Task Force meetings were expertly facilitated by Steve Charbonneau of Community Mediation Concepts, who helped guide our discussions and keep us on task. Staffing was provided by Debra Bartleson and Ursula Null from City Council, and Seneca Holmes and Katherine O'Connor from the Office of Economic Development, all of whom provided behind the scenes work that made the Task Force efficient and productive.

# TASK FORCE MEMBERS

## • Task Force Co-Chairs

Doug Linkhart- City Councilman-at-Large

André Pettigrew- Executive Director, Denver Office of Economic Development

## • City Council

Councilwoman Jeanne Faatz, District 2

Councilman Paul Lopez, District 3

Councilman Charlie Brown, District 6

Councilman Chris Nevitt, District 7

## • Community Task Force Members

Ferd Belz- Cherokee Development Co.

Carl Bourgeois- Civil Technology, Inc.

Carmen Carrillo- Denver Human Services

Mike Cerbo- Colorado AFL-CIO

Peter Chapman- Seedco Denver

Jim Garcia- Making Connections Denver

Ledy Garcia-Eckstein- Metro Denver WIRED

Ismael Guerrero- Denver Housing Authority

Paula Gomez Farrell- Denver Office of Economic Development, Workforce Development

Tony Hernandez- Colorado Division of Local Government

Hi Howard- The Piton Foundation

Tracy Huggins- Denver Urban Renewal Authority

Barclay Jones- Mile High United Way

Jim Kircheimer- The Downtown Denver Partnership

Awilda Marquez- Denver Excise and Licenses

Barbara McDonnell- Colorado Community College System

Getabecha Mekonnen- North East Denver Housing

Rob Merritt- Denver Auditors Office

Dixie Malone- Denver Public Library

David Portillo- Denver Foundation

Carmen Rhodes- Front Range Economic Strategy Center

Tom Schilling- InterMountain Corporate Affairs

Rob Smith- Rocky Mountain MicroFinance Inc.

Dave Webster- Inter Neighborhood Cooperation

## • Task Force Staff

Debra Bartleson, Legislative Analyst, Denver City Council

Steve Charbonneau, Facilitator, Community Mediation Concepts

Seneca Holmes, Analyst, Denver Office of Economic Development

Ursula Null, Aide to Councilman Linkhart

Katherine O'Connor, Analyst, Denver Office of Economic Development

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## DENVER ECONOMIC PROSPERITY TASK FORCE: IMPROVING ECONOMIC OUTCOMES FOR DENVER RESIDENTS

Denver has long been a leader in utilizing innovative programs and initiatives to strengthen the local economy and enhance residents' ability to prosper in our City. With this pioneering spirit in mind, the Denver Mayor's Office, André Pettigrew, the Executive Director of the Office of Economic Development and Denver City Councilman at-Large Doug Linkhart convened the Economic Prosperity Task Force.

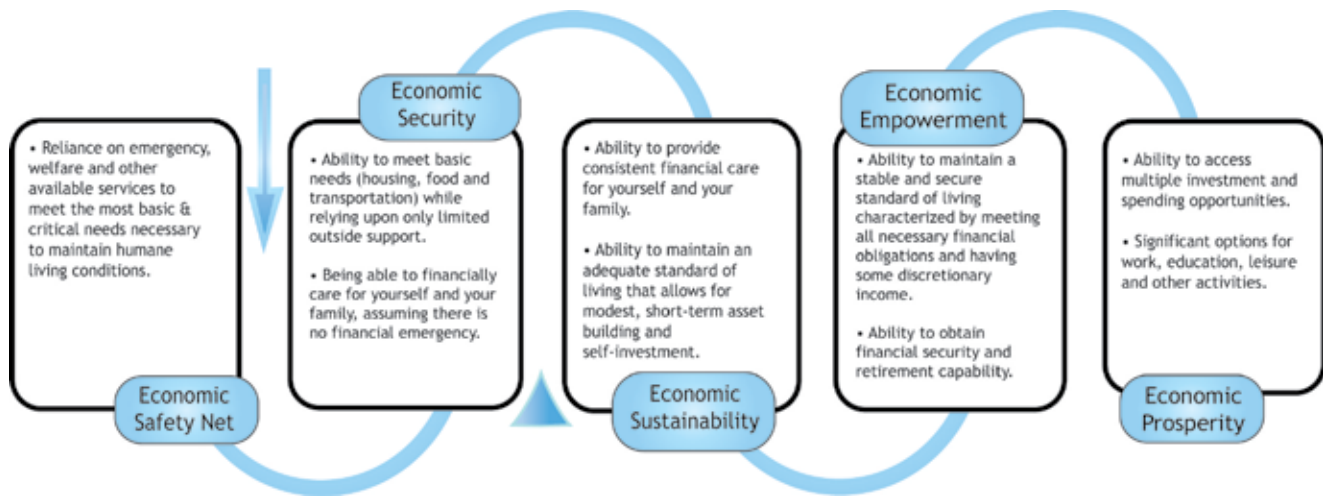
The Task Force was comprised of policy makers, businesses representatives, nonprofit agency representatives and community leaders. The mission of the Task Force was to assess the economic condition of Denver residents, examine current programs and develop five actionable recommendations to create systemic change that will improve the economic well being of all Denver residents. Our goal was to implement this mission by identifying unique and innovative tools, partnerships and approaches to maximizing economic outcomes for Denver residents, while concurrently fueling positive economic development for the City as a whole.

The Task Force met monthly for one year, from March 2008-2009, to discuss various interdisciplinary topics pertaining to the economic prosperity of Denver residents: self sufficiency, economic mobility and sustainability, entrepreneurship, special needs populations, and community-rich outcomes. For each of these broad issues the Task Force examined the tools and programs in use by the city, non-profit organizations and the private sector. In addition, we analyzed effective ways of utilizing these tools, examined and discuss innovative approaches found in best practices, and focused attention on creating outcomes that would foster economic prosperity and empowerment.

**The Task Force defined economic prosperity for individuals as living in an economic situation in which the making, spending and management of personal income is meeting one's needs and current chosen lifestyle.** This is achieved when individuals and families have access to financial opportunities and resources that enable them to generate enough income to meet the financial responsibilities and expenses consistent with their chosen lifestyle situation.

To better identify and discuss resources, opportunities and financial goals, the Task Force developed a conceptual framework outlining five key stages on an economic continuum. The stages in the framework are: Economic Safety Net, Economic Security, Economic Sustainability, Economic Empowerment, and Economic Prosperity.

## Conceptual Steps to Economic Prosperity



The Task Force used this framework to examine the complex interplay between resources and opportunities, while identifying ways to improve the quality and availability of both. We discussed the role of individuals, government and the private sector and how they interact intentionally or not, and how this impacts an individual's ability to move from one stage to the next. While it was important to identify these five stages, the Task Force acknowledged that its true work was to find ways to enhance movement from one stage to the next. In the interest of strengthening the overall economy, the Task Force believes it is appropriate for government to "grease the skids" – that is, remove barriers and enhance access to opportunities, making movement within the economy more fluid and dynamic at all levels.

To this end the Task Force developed five actionable goals:

1. **Financial Literacy for Adults:** Improve financial literacy and increase opportunities among adults for asset building and self-investment by increasing access to and use of financial education tools, banking options and other financial resources.
2. **Financial Literacy for Youth:** Improve financial literacy, knowledge, awareness, and management skills among youth, leading to increased financial opportunities
3. **Strategic Community Assistance:** Improve the delivery and effectiveness of community oriented services through partnerships, coordination, and cooperation among a wide range of community assistance providers and stakeholders.
4. **Revised Eligibility Standards:** Identify appropriate assistance levels for households at the safety net and security level by developing and implementing an alternative benefits eligibility standard that reflects modern household expenses, spending and resources. Explore ways to address the cliff effect.
5. **Comprehensive Job and Business Assistance:** Develop a comprehensive resource for education, training, career advancement and business development possibilities that anticipates future employment opportunities, and market trends, and includes alternative education, alternative credentialing, mentoring and youth programs.

The time is now to create system-wide changes that will enable residents to achieve a more economically

secure future. The current economic recession highlights the need to make it easier for people to change jobs or start a new business in response to changing economic conditions. It also highlights the need for people to reach a level of economic security, with sufficient saving and support systems to weather economic storms.

Even in the best economic climate, many Denver residents face personal challenges in moving along the economic continuum described above. The goals established by the Task Force are aimed at helping residents achieve economic prosperity in both good times and bad.