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Amazon and its 50,000 employees could make Denver the “San Francisco of the plains”

With Denver jumping into the national competition to get Amazon’s new headquarters, some residents are wondering not what the Mile High City can do for Amazon, but what Amazon can do for — or what it might do to — the Mile High City.

Amazon’s so called HQ2 is expected to add thousands of jobs wherever it locates, which some view as more of a challenge for Denver than an opportunity, especially since roughly a thousand people already move to the city each month, the cost of housing is increasing and getting around feels more and more like navigating a sliding puzzle.

“A company of this scale, 50,000 tech employees with average wages of \$100,000, that could by itself complete the gentrification process of Denver,” said Brad Segal, president of Progressive Urban Management Associates. “We could become San Francisco of the plains — if you will — if we don’t mitigate the impacts.”

Colorado and Denver officials say going after Amazon and its more than \$5 billion worth of investment makes sense, and if they successfully land the Seattle-based e-commerce behemoth, the area could be able to attract other major players going forward.

“Adding to our critical mass of Fortune 500s or more visible multinational brands is really important for us to continue to grow and elevate the state and city as a tier one location,” said Michelle Hadwiger, director of global business for the state.

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Amazon and its 50,000 employees could make Denver the “San Francisco of the plains”

Adrian D. Garcia / Follow September 14, 2017 / 6:45 am / Business, Denver news, Real estate

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Amazon's Seattle campus, in both the downtown and South Lake Union neighborhoods. (Jordan Stead/Amazon)

With Denver jumping into the national competition to get Amazon’s new headquarters, some residents are wondering not what the Mile High City can do for Amazon, but what Amazon can do for — or what it might do to — the Mile High City.

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Hadwiger and others from the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade are working with the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. to identify sites in and around Denver that fit with what Amazon is looking for. After Aurora, Denver and other interested municipalities provide sites where Amazon could build or renovate, as well as incentives they could offer, the state will submit a final proposal to Amazon. Several states will likely be following a similar process.

“I don’t think the question is going to be, ‘Should we or should we not do this?’ Clearly, we’re going to run after this,” Segal said. “My thoughts are more, ‘If Denver is going to be in the running, how should we do that and how should we compete with other cities?’”

Segal consults organizations on downtown and community development, co-chairs the community organization All in Denver and previously managed economic development programs for the Downtown Denver Partnership. He said that Denver is already a strong candidate to get Amazon — the New York Times named it the No. 1 candidate — so the city could and should avoid feeling the need to offer a big pot of money.

“This an opportunity for Denver to invest in itself as opposed to investing in Amazon,” Segal said. “What could differentiate Denver from these other cities is not larding incentives at Amazon but actually use this to create a stronger sort of opportunity basis here in terms of affordable housing, education and transportation.”

If Amazon likes Denver as it is and wants to support an inclusive, diverse culture, the city will need to invest civic resources so neighborhoods aren’t changed as a result of Amazon coming, he said.

“Having more multinational corporations located in the state helps us to secure more international flight routes, helps us to secure more frequent domestic routes and helps us to diversify the economy — meaning diversification of thought and diversification of ethnicity,” Hadwiger said.

“The more taxpayer dollars that we get flowing into the state and the more investment we get flowing into the state means we get increased revenue which means we have more money to fund infrastructure projects and such.”

Hadwiger called Colorado’s incentive programs “extremely conservative” and said the state won’t be able to offer the kind of large tax breaks or cash perks that other governments might be able to.

“When a company is going to invest \$5 billion, they want to know the state’s investing in them as well, so we’re going to work within in the framework of our programs and offer what we can conservatively, as we always do,” she said.

What the state and municipalities will offer remains to be seen. Denver said it plans to follow the typical process of making sure it’s getting more than it’s giving.

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“Any proposal would include comprehensive economic analysis, to ensure positive benefits to the city,” said Derek Woodbury, spokesman for the Denver Office of Economic Development.

“Most importantly, in consideration of any opportunity, we look closely at how a company would contribute as a civic steward and partner in our community to help shape a stronger city,” Woodbury said in a statement to Denverite.

Amazon estimates its investments in Seattle from 2010 through 2016 resulted in an additional \$38 billion to the city’s economy. The company said it’s looking for “a city that is excited to work with us and where our customers, employees and the community can all benefit.”

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More than 500 citations were issued at Red Rocks since 2014, and most were on days with EDM concerts

Denver's Red Rocks Amphitheatre is safe, but whether it's family-friendly or not really depends on the day — or act, according to Denver police.

Dozens of musicians and entertainers perform annually at the outdoor theater, drawing tens of thousands of people to the venue about 12 miles southeast of downtown Denver. And sometimes those people bring drugs or get into fights or break into cars or do any number of illegal activities that lead to an arrest or citation.

More than 535 citations have been issued within the boundaries of Red Rocks Park from 2014 through June 2017, law enforcement data show. We take a look at those crime numbers, including what types of acts are linked with the most citations, in our Chart of the Week.

During the last three and a half years, law enforcement officers most often wrote tickets for illegally trespassing at Red Rocks. About 18 percent of tickets — 97 citations — issued at the park from 2014 through June of this year were trespassing-related, data from Denver Department of Safety and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office show.

The number of people caught in off-limits areas of the park, in cars and on other property where they weren't supposed to be was about on par with how many people were caught stealing. About 17.7 percent — 95 citations — of overall crime in the park was related to stealing services, stealing items from cars or just stealing cars themselves from Red Rocks, according to the data.

"Our main concern is when people go up there, that it is a safe environment just like the Pepsi Center and Coors Field," said Patrick Phelan, commander of the Special Operations Division at the Denver Police Department.

Denver police officers and park rangers patrol Red Rocks Park with help from the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

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More than 500 citations were issued at Red Rocks since 2014, and most were on days with EDM concerts



Adrian D. Garcia / [Follow](#)

August 2, 2017 / 2:54 pm / Denver news

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Park rangers stand outside of Red Rocks Amphitheatre during a



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Red Rocks is unique because it's a park owned by the city and county of Denver but surrounded by Jefferson County. During shows, Denver police deal with misdemeanors and enforce city ordinances. They partner with Jefferson County's Sheriff's Office to handle felonies and help patrol the park when concerts and events aren't taking place.

Certain concerts and events get special treatment in the form of increased law enforcement presence, Phelan said.

"I won't give you specifics, but we have several officers at every concert," Phelan said. "Based on historical data that I have from previous shows, if there's been a certain band or entertainer that we've had different issues with, then historically we'll look at that and say, 'We need to staff a little bit higher on that.'"

Electronic dance music, aka EDM, concerts tend to get a little more law enforcement presence, he said. "For that crowd, it's a younger crowd. They tend to probably drink a little bit more. Maybe there's a little more drug use as far as marijuana or something like that," Phelan said. "So we have a presence up there."

Although open alcohol is technically prohibited at the park, according to the city's website, officers do allow those 21 and older to drink while tailgating. Only five alcohol-related citations were issued at the park since 2014, according to data from law enforcement. That's compared to 87 drug-related citations, the third highest category of crime after trespassing and theft.

It turns out, the most citations were issued during days with dance bands or artists, according to a Denverite analysis. For the analysis, Denverite asked Denver Arts & Venues for a list of all the entertainment acts from 2014 through June 2017. We then assigned each of those acts a genre based on how they were labeled in iTunes. This is a consistent, albeit not perfect, system where Ed Sheeran is a "singer/songwriter," Paul Simon performs "pop" and Tom Petty and Ryan Adams both fall under "rock."

Denver Arts & Venues is seeing stiff competition among bands and performers that want to play at Red Rocks even with the cost for some shows hitting the \$100,000 to \$120,000 price tag when you add up all the costs and fees, said Tad Bowman, venue director for Red Rocks and the Denver Coliseum.

Red Rocks Amphitheatre is hosting a growing number of entertainment events in addition to fitness-related programs and other offerings. Altogether the park brought in more than 1 million concert and event goers last year, Bowman said.

Bands are flocking to the park, Bowman said, because of its unparalleled beauty and due to the fact that in recent years touring and live shows are a more important revenue generator than record sales.

While Arts & Venues staff manages who plays at the amphitheatre, and tends to give priority to those who have played the venue before, the organization is avoiding getting into the business of deciding what type or genre of act can rent the theatre.

In 1971, after tear gas was used to deal with unruly crowds at a Jethro Tull concert, the city banned rock shows at Red Rocks. The ban was in place until Barry Fey, who died in 2013, successfully sued the city in 1975 and forced Denver officials out of the genre-picking business.

The Fort Collins Coloradoan
May 1, 2016
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Fix sought for Colo.'s \$9.2M in food stamp errors

By: Adrian D. Garcia

When struggling Coloradans turn to the government for help getting groceries, they don't expect to be handed another bill.

But due to agency errors at the state and county levels, thousands of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients are forced to pay money back every year. Colorado ranked second among U.S. states in the number of over-awarded SNAP recipients during fiscal 2014.

A Fort Collins single mom said she was left owing \$2,007 late last year due to a Larimer County Department of Human Services worker's error on her application for the federal food assistance program commonly referred to as "food stamps."

Courtney Davis didn't realize she was being overpaid until after she stopped receiving benefits in October.

On Oct. 30, the state sent Davis a letter telling her an "admin error" caused her to receive food assistance for six months spanning May to October 2015. The error was reportedly the result of a case worker forgetting to include Davis' tips as a part of her income as a waitress. The additional pay put Davis outside of income restrictions to receive benefits through SNAP.

Davis plans to make \$20 monthly payments to repay what she received, but there's a possibility the government will recoup the remainder of what she owes from her annual tax returns.

"I went to these people for help," Davis said. "But because they messed up, now I'm in an even more in a messed-up situation than I would have been if they didn't give me any help at all."

The majority — 83 percent — of the 42,958 overissuance claims established in Colorado in 2014 resulted from "agency error," according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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The screenshot shows the article's header 'Fix sought for Colo.'s \$9.2M in food stamp errors' and author 'Adrian D. Garcia, agarcia@coloradoan.com'. It includes a photo of a person carrying groceries, a sidebar for Microsoft Office 365, and a 'TOP VIDEOS' section.

The state's rate of agency error was nearly double the national average.

Colorado's SNAP program is administered by each of the state's 64 counties. Policy experts and county officials claim part of the reason for the preponderance of errors is a rapid uptick in demand for public assistance services coupled with a lack of additional staffing, training and other resources.

In 2014, Colorado provided about \$767 million through the SNAP program to 6 million clients. Mistakes made by agency computers or workers resulted in about 1 percent of that money — \$9.2 million in benefits — being over-awarded to Colorado families, according to federal data from 2014.

The data from that most recent report doesn't reflect system changes the Colorado Department of Human Services made in January 2015, said Lena Wilson, division director of food and energy. Wilson said the state focused on improving the timeliness and accuracy of case management to decrease the incidence of agency error.

"A review of next year's activity report should reflect the improvements in Colorado," she said.

The 2015 report won't be released until after October, according to the USDA.

Lawmakers seek a fix

State legislators aren't waiting to see whether those 2015 changes will increase the efficiency of Colorado's SNAP management.

On April 19, a bipartisan trio of state senators — Sen. Pat Steadman, D-Denver; Sen. Kevin Grantham, R-Ordway; and Sen. Kent Lambert R-Colorado Springs — introduced a bill to improve application processing timeliness and payment and reduce case and procedural error rates.

"Right now, everything gets masked at the state level. If some counties are dragging us down, everyone suffers," Steadman said. "This bill tries to enact some reforms to create additional accountability for counties as they administer the state's food stamp program."

Senate Bill 190 takes a carrot-and-stick approach to improving SNAP management in all 64 counties.

The bill encourages county human or social service departments to exceed federal performance measures for administering the program. If the state receives federal bonus money for its timeliness, accuracy and improvements, those dollars would be passed on to the successful-performing counties.

However, if the state is sanctioned by the USDA for poor administration of the SNAP program, poor-performing counties would be fined.

“This is an overall positive thing for counties, because we’ve been saying for some time that we’ve been feeling our capacity is really at risk,” said Laura Walker, director of the Larimer County Department of Human Services.

Public assistance cases have doubled since 2011 and staff has struggled to meet the demand for services, Walker said.

If passed, SB 190 would shift \$550,000 to the Colorado Department of Human Services to analyze how counties administer public assistance programs. After the study, legislators or county commissioners would need to approve funding for more resources for human or social service departments as needed.

“As a state, we’re not performing well,” said Michelle Webster, manager of research and policy analysis at the Colorado Center on Law and Policy. “From our perspective, giving the state some additional capacity, which they so badly need, will help the state take on a more proactive role in improving the performance of the SNAP program.”

Despite similar studies in past years, Walker is hopeful further staffing, training and other resources will follow passage of SB 190. After passing the Senate, the bill was introduced in the House on Tuesday.

The current system could discourage some families from getting the food assistance they need, said David Super, professor at Georgetown University Law Center. Super studies the strengths and inefficiencies of SNAP at both the federal and state levels.

The Colorado Center on Law and Policy, The Colorado Joint Budget Committee and Hunger Free Colorado are among the groups that support the bill.

The legislation is a step toward addressing over-issuing benefits, Webster said, in the hope that fewer Coloradans like Davis will be forced to repay SNAP benefits.

“I had no way of knowing that the amount being given to me was incorrect, as I went on good faith that the county worker would be aware of her job duties and how to perform them correctly,” Davis said.

“We were forced to quit. We couldn’t even get cattle trucks in and out any more because of the traffic,” Ruff said.

‘A community is never just static’

Fort Collins Planning Manager Cameron Gloss said growth will continue in the city, but urban development competing with rural land will be less of an issue leading to 2040.

“There’s certain areas of the community, particularly as you think about the Mason (Street) corridor and the downtown area, where the area will urbanize and see larger and taller buildings and more activities,” Gloss said. “By in large, most of the community will have a similar character in the future.”

Most of Fort Collins’ growth is projected for the areas north and east of the city near the Mountain Vista neighborhood, North College Avenue, East Mulberry Street corridor and the Anheuser-Busch InBev facility.

Unlike its neighbors, Fort Collins is largely landlocked — meaning there’s little available space left for new development. Based on current development rates, zoning codes and some city projections, Fort Collins will be built out by 2040.

“We came up with a range that between 236,000 and 255,000 people would be the likely ultimate development population of the community within the growth management area,” Gloss said.

But even a community’s buildout projections can grow. Codes could one day allow for higher density projects, and restrictions could change, paving the way for taller buildings.

“One would assume that growth would stop, but it doesn’t. It just takes a little bit of a different form,” Gloss said. “A community is never just static.”

Not just Fort Collins

For the next 25 years, Northern Colorado is expected to be among the fastest growing places in the country. Communities from Wellington to Johnstown are preparing for the change that’s already apparent with new subdivisions lining their streets.

To the south, Loveland is balancing the onslaught of growth. The city expects new development will continue near Taft and Wilson avenues to the north. The Centerra area, near I-25 and U.S. Highway 34, is also expected to grow.

“By about 2045, we’re looking to double, which means we’ll be the size Fort Collins is today,” said Karl Barton, Loveland senior city planner. “I think in 2040 you’re going to see more density in places like our downtown area. But, if you go out to an existing single-family neighborhood, in 2040 it’s going to feel very much the same.”

To the east, Weld County is also preparing. Greeley’s long-range planner expects the city to become more sophisticated by 2040 with more apartment, multifamily and mixed-use buildings designed to draw in more millennials and baby boomers.

“Census folks think that Fort Collins and Loveland will lead (population growth) for the next 20 years, but then development will gear down,” said John Barnett, long range planner for Greeley. “After that, Weld County and Greeley are expected to become the center of growth.”

By 2040, Weld County is expected to see about 290,000 more people.

Greeley has infrastructure — streets, water taps, sewage lines, etc. — in place for oncoming growth, Barnett said, “It will be interesting to see if smaller communities will keep up and put out infrastructure.”

Each year, hundreds of people move to Timnath, Windsor and Severance — three municipalities sandwiched between the Fort Collins-Loveland and Greeley metros. Nearly 10,000 people arrived the past decade, and the towns only expect new residents to keep coming.

“Keeping up with the work growth generates” and meeting “the expectations of the residents in a fiscally responsible and timely manner” are Timnath’s biggest challenges, said April Getchius, Timnath town manager.

Small communities seek independence

In addition, Windsor, Timnath and other area communities are pursuing their independence from Greeley, Loveland and Fort Collins. The towns are adding amenities and going after job opportunities to keep residents from having to commute.

“Certainly as a region we’re all intertwined. When it comes to traffic, commuters and employment, we’re influenced a great deal by our neighbors,” Getchius said. “Ultimately, we’d like to see employment opportunities here in Timnath so people aren’t commuting. We’re going to have expanded commercial and civic space ... we’ll be less and less influenced.”

By 2040, Timnath hopes to transform its downtown to a regional draw by adding an art district, boutique shops and local eateries.

Timnath and Windsor tend to have higher average home prices and draw those looking for agrarian lots and a small-town feel. New residents often want the amenities that larger communities can provide without the traffic, density and other issues, Getchius said.

But retail tends to follow rooftops, and communities have population thresholds before planned parks and other amenities can be developed.

Residents are also left battling traffic woes near Harmony Road, Interstate 25 and other major thoroughfares — areas where more growth is planned.

“As the town grows, traffic increases and challenges become more prevalent,” said Scott Ballstadt, director of planning for Windsor. “Hopefully in 2040, we’ll still have that small-town character and just a more walkable community with a bit higher density and neighborhoods with commercial and mixed-uses.”

Cost of development

Growth is not completely untethered. Development is dependent on a slew of factors including water limitations, construction costs and available land.

“Colorado in general has some carrying capacity constraints, mostly concerned with water, and as planners that’s very much on our radar,” Loveland planner Barton said. “What we don’t know is what the (maximum capacity) number is.”

Until the number is known, people like Ruff will likely see farmland disappear, as has been the case in Fort Collins.

The 70-year-old struggled to find words for how things feel now in the city. Corrals collect rust just outside his door, and less than a mile away, houses are being built in the 166-acre Kechter Farm.

“I don’t see any signs of (growth) slowing down,” Ruff said.

Growth & data reporter [Adrian D. Garcia](#) can be reached at 970-224-7835 or [Twitter.com/adriandgarcia](#).

INews Network at Rocky Mountain PBS

Jan. 24, 2014

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Food Stamp Assistance in Colorado Has Doubled Since Great Recession

By: Adrian D. Garcia

More Coloradans are receiving food assistance today than even during the worst months of the Great Recession.

Since 2007 the number of people receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program — formerly known as food stamps — has more than doubled. An average of 508,200 residents qualified for SNAP dollars each month during 2013, according to the Colorado Department of Human Services.

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Colorado food stamp participation has doubled since recession

By Adrian D. Garcia; Published 10:00 p.m. MT Jan. 26, 2014



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More Coloradans are receiving government help to buy food today than during the worst months of the Great Recession.

The number of people receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program — commonly known as food stamps — has more than doubled since 2007. An average of 508,200 Colorado residents qualified for SNAP dollars each month during 2013, according to the state Department of Human Services.

This year the state predicts that an additional 44,000 Coloradans will sign up for help putting food on the table. But available assistance is limited. The average SNAP household of 2.5 people receives about \$300 a month, according to government figures, or \$10 a day.

"The big challenge right now is in November food stamp benefits were reduced when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009's temporary boost ended," said Michelle Ray, spokeswoman for the advocacy group Hunger Free Colorado.

The dollar reduction means some families are sacrificing nutritional food like milk and

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This year the state predicts that an additional 44,000 Coloradans will sign up to receive help putting food on the table. However, the assistance available is limited.

The average SNAP household of 2.5 people receives \$300 a month, or \$10 a day to buy food during a typical 30day month.

"The big challenge right now is in November food stamp benefits were reduced when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009's temporary boost ended," said Michelle Ray, spokeswoman for the advocacy group Hunger Free Colorado.

The dollar deduction means some families are sacrificing nutritional food like milk and produce for cheaper, less healthy alternatives, Ray said.

In some cases food banks have stepped in to assist those in need.

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“We don’t care if they get food stamps, a lot of people just need help” said Vic Ocana, executive director of Compassion Food Banks. Ocana said Compassion’s nine locations in Colorado all report growing lines for food distribution since last fall.

“We try to give them enough food for the month, but people are more anxious for help now,” he said.

In recent years the SNAP program has become caught in political infighting. House Republicans want to cut benefits in the name of reducing government spending, while Senate Democrats argue that the program is important in the fight against hunger. In Colorado about 40 percent of “working age” SNAP users, those 16 to 65, were employed as of June 2013.

“Seeing one person abusing the system ruins it for everyone else,” said Andrea Fuller, executive director of the monthly newspaper Denver VOICE, about the potential for fraud. “For the majority of people on SNAP it’s humiliating and humbling.”

Before getting her position with VOICE in November, Fuller relied on SNAP benefits to help feed her family, she said.

“Even working multiple part time jobs I wasn’t earning enough,” Fuller said. In 2011 she enrolled in the SNAP program. “It’s one thing for me to be hungry, but I can’t bear to see my children hungry,” she said.

Many SNAP users just aren’t earning enough to feed themselves and their families, Fuller said. Others need government assistance after losing a job, some are disabled. The population is diverse, Fuller said, “not enough people have enough income right now.”

Communication from the state can be confusing for SNAP users, she said, and attempting to contact a caseworker can be “frustrating” because it can take several days.

Keeping up with the rapid increase in SNAP participants has been a challenge for offices across the state, especially in rural areas, acknowledged Sue McGinn, director of the state’s food and energy division.

A problem in which 5 percent of Coloradans on SNAP were accidentally overpaid by the state and then forced to pay back the money has been addressed, McGinn said. In July, the state will implement new software that should improve communication.

“The program has never had a 100 percent increase in participants in such a short amount of time,” she said. “Colorado’s participation rate is still low compared to other states. We tend to be in the bottom five when ranked nationally.”

State officials remain skeptical that SNAP participation rates will return to ‘07 levels any time soon. “Once the economy gets better I’m not expecting a huge shift back,” McGinn said. “We’re just seeing the stabilization of the program.”

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