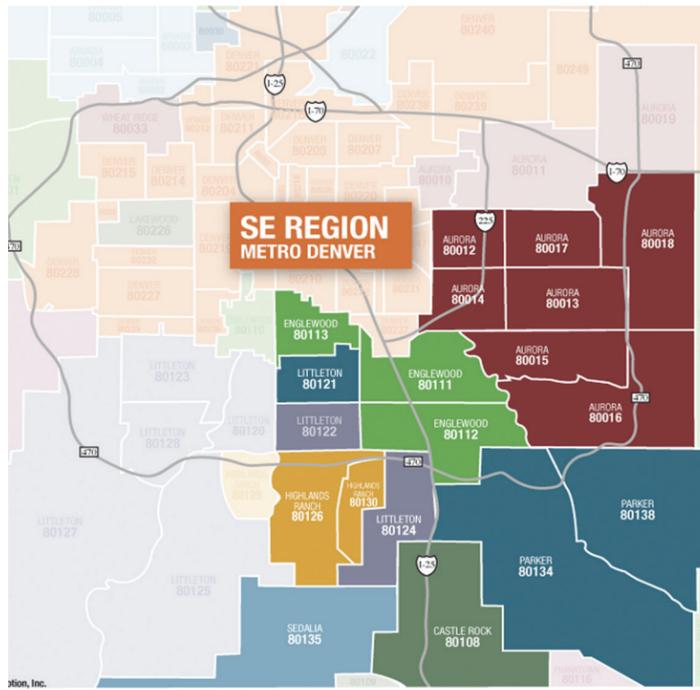# Whose ZIP code is it, anyway? Part 1

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Citizens of a certain age will remember when United States mailing addresses contained a two-digit number between the city and the state called a zone, to help the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) organize delivery routes. According to the website of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum that zoning system was created in 1943, during World War II. At that time, "U.S. annual mail volume was growing steadily," having increased from 28 billion pieces of mail in 1940 to 33 billion in 1943. "In addition, post offices across the country were forced to hire inexperienced clerks as more experienced staff members went off to serve in the war." The postal zone system made sorting and delivering mail more efficient and accurate.

Over the next 19 years, annual mail volume doubled to 66.5 billion pieces, including advertisements and periodicals. The growth of suburban communities resulted in greater dispersion of the population. To address the growing need for a more effective system than postal zones provided, USPS introduced the Zone Improvement Plan in 1962, which used five digits instead of two. We call them ZIP codes. They were designed by further refining the postal codes already in place from 1943 (e.g., Denver 24, Colorado became Denver, Colorado 80224).

In south metro Denver, Aurora was first incorporated as the town of Fletcher in 1891, renamed and recognized by the Colorado Secretary of State as Aurora in 1928. Littleton was incorporated in 1890 and Englewood became a city in 1903. When postal zones were introduced in 1943, those Colorado cities were recognized and assigned postal zone numbers, which would later become the basis of ZIP codes when they were adopted in 1962.

Cherry Hills Village (1945) and Greenwood Village (1950) were incorporated after the postal zone system was put into effect. Not having been assigned postal zone numbers, they weren't assigned ZIP codes either,

Map courtesy The Berkshire Group, Denver Real Estate

when the system was updated in 1962. Centennial didn't become a city until 2000. All three "newbies" have been "borrowing" ZIP codes ever since, from the original cities in the area that had their own ZIP codes, Littleton, Englewood and Aurora.

Addresses in Greenwood Village, eight square miles in size with a population of 16,000, are in two Englewood ZIP codes, 80111 and 80112, and one Littleton ZIP code, 80121.

Addresses in Cherry Hills Village, six square miles in size with a population of 6,000, are also in two Englewood ZIP codes, 80111 and 80113, and one Littleton ZIP code, 80121.

Centennial is nearly 30 square miles and has a population approaching 115,000. Its residents have six different ZIP codes, two belonging to Littleton (80121 and 80122), two to Englewood (80111 and 80112) and two belonging to Aurora (80015 and 80016).

Over the years, numerous elected officials from the three "new" cities have attempted to get their own ZIP codes from USPS, to no avail. The closest they've come is to get permission to use their city names on their mail, though those names are the second choice of the USPS for efficient mail delivery. Unitedstateszipcodes.org lists Englewood as the "primary, preferred city" for 80111, and GV, CHV and Centennial as "acceptable" to use in the mailing address. Zip-codes.

com lists 80111 as being an Englewood ZIP code and GV, CHV and Centennial as "aliases." It is the same for all the other ZIP codes used in CHV, GV and Centennial.

The other accommodation USPS gave elected city officials, as a consolation prize for not getting their own ZIP codes, is to put their cities' names on the outside of post office buildings within their city boundaries. The post office for Littleton's 80121 ZIP code is located at 2221 E. Arapahoe Road in Centennial and has the name Centennial, Colorado on the building. The post office for Englewood's 80111 ZIP code is located at 6855 S. Dayton Street in Greenwood Village and has the name Greenwood Village, Colorado on the building.

If you are a resident of the cities of CHV, GV or Centennial, you can use your own city name in your address or the name of the original city to whom your ZIP code was assigned. Either will work for getting your mail delivered.

It gets more complicated when you're ordering from your favorite online retailer and you want to make sure you're charged the correct sales tax rate and that any city sales tax you pay ends up in your city's coffers (CHV, GV or Centennial), not those of Englewood, Littleton or Aurora.

We'll explain more about sales tax in our next installment.

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