



DESTINATION DENVER COLORADO · RELOCATION GUIDE

Moving to Brighton, Colorado

The honest version: the trade-offs, the costs that surprise people, where buyers actually land, and how to plan a move from another state.

THE SHORT ANSWER

Brighton is the Adams County seat, a home-rule city of about 43,000 people (2024 Census estimate) northeast of downtown Denver, with a historic downtown on Main and Bridge streets, farmland on its edges and master-planned neighborhoods filling in between. It suits buyers who want space: larger lots, agricultural zoning, a real small-town downtown and Barr Lake State Park next door. It suits people less well if they commute to Denver every day, want rail transit, would rather avoid metro district taxes, or need a five-day school week.

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Is Brighton the right fit for you?

When I covered the north-metro suburbs, I put Brighton in the group for people who are willing to "spread a little farther" out, along with Louisville, Superior, Lafayette and Erie. It's not one of the 10-to-30-minutes-from-Denver towns like Northglenn, Thornton or Westminster. What you get for the extra distance, in my words, is this: Brighton is "for those who want actual space. We're talking larger lots, agricultural zoning, and really a true small-town downtown area." If you know me, you know I love a good downtown, and Brighton has one. Brighton has a lot going for it.

The trade-off is the drive. My estimate is about 45 minutes into Denver, and in heavy traffic out of northeast Denver it's closer to an hour. And there's a feel on some edges of town that, as I put it, "can feel a bit on the industrial fringe."

Some background. Brighton began as Hughes Station, a Denver Pacific Railway depot named around 1868 for the railroad's president. Daniel F. Carmichael, often called the "Father of Brighton," filed the first town plat in 1881, the town incorporated in 1887, and voters made it the permanent Adams County seat in 1904. It grew as a vegetable shipping point with a Great Western Sugar factory and the Kurer Pickle Co. The 2020 census counted 40,083 residents, all but 365 on the Adams County side; the 2024 estimate is 43,473.

Why people choose Brighton

- Larger lots and agricultural zoning
- A real historic downtown on Main and Bridge streets, with the Armory Performing Arts Center nearby
- Barr Lake State Park, with its 8.8-mile loop and wintering bald eagles, on the edge of town
- Quick access to Denver International Airport via E-470
- The county seat in town: the Adams County Government Center and Justice Center are both in Brighton

What gives people pause

- The commute. Plan on about 45 minutes to Denver, more in traffic.
- No rail. Weekday express buses are the transit option.
- School District 27J runs a four-day school week, so most families need a plan for Mondays
- Many newer neighborhoods sit in metro districts. The city counted 40 metro districts as of 2022, each adding a levy to the property tax bill.
- Water: a 2019 rate fight, an aging treatment plant and 2026 drought restrictions (details below)
- Data centers: In October 2026 the city council approved a one-year moratorium on data center applications, after developers withdrew a rezoning application for a proposed data center campus.

Where is Brighton, and how do you get around?

Brighton sits along the South Platte River on the plains northeast of Denver, at about 4,987 feet. I-76 runs along its east side, US 85 runs north-south through town, and E-470 skirts its southern outskirts.

- **Into Denver:** I-76 southwest through Commerce City, or US 85. My estimate is about 45 minutes, up to an hour in heavy traffic. Drive it at rush hour from the specific neighborhood before you buy.
- **Bus:** As of the fall 2026 schedule, RTD's RX Brighton/Denver Express runs weekdays only between the US 85 & Bridge St Park-n-Ride and Wade Blank Civic Center Station downtown, with six northbound trips a day and run times of about 45 to 55 minutes. Brighton FlexRide is a weekday on-demand shuttle inside the city, covering stops such as Prairie Center, downtown and Platte Valley Hospital.
- **Rail:** None. The nearest train is the N Line commuter rail at Eastlake/124th in Thornton, which opened in 2020. RTD's plans include a future extension north to Highway 7, with no construction date set.
- **The airport:** E-470 connects to Peña Boulevard and Denver International Airport. RTD's 145X runs from the US 85 & Bridge St Park-n-Ride to the airport.
- **Thornton, Broomfield and Boulder:** Highway 7 runs west from Brighton as 160th Avenue to I-25, and continues as Baseline Road toward Lafayette and Boulder.
- **The mountains:** Not close. Plan on going through Denver to I-70, or west on Highway 7 to Boulder.
- **Road projects:** A new I-76 and Bridge Street interchange has been through environmental review, and in 2025 federal money was requested for signals at I-76 and Bromley Lane. Neither had a construction date as of fall 2026.

What are Brighton's neighborhoods like?

Brighton is a historic core, a ring of master-planned subdivisions and farmland around both. The areas buyers ask about most:

Historic Downtown

The original grid around Main Street and Bridge Street. Several brick buildings from 1895 to 1925 still stand, including the Leffingwell Building at Main and Bridge. The 1907 Hughes Train Station was moved to Bridge Street and now serves as the visitor center. Homes nearby are generally older, and it's the most walkable part of Brighton.

Brighton Crossings

A master-planned community whose amenities include the Venture Center and pool, a fitness center with a sport court, a splash park, a dog park and neighborhood parks. Brighton Crossings' metro districts fund the infrastructure, run the amenities, enforce covenants and appear as a levy on your Adams County tax bill.

Bromley Park

Another of Brighton's metro-district communities. The district files annual reports with the city and with both Adams and Weld counties. Ask for the levy before you offer.

Prairie Center

The commercial district on the city's south side near I-76 and E-470, with big-box retail (Home Depot, Target and Kohl's) and restaurants. Platte Valley Hospital's campus is at Prairie Center Drive. Prairie Center's metro districts can levy property tax to repay infrastructure debt, so property within the districts carries that cost too.

Brighton Ridge and the newer master plans

The city lists metro-district development groups including Brighton Ridge, Adams Crossing, Case Farms, Platte River Ranch, Ridgeline Vista, Village at Southgate, and Brighton Lakes, Farmlore and Indigo Trails. Many are newer subdivisions; ask the builder or district about build-out. Expect new construction, young landscaping and a metro district.

Historic Splendid Valley and the farm edge

South of Brighton, from the South Platte east onto the plains, is farmland the city and Adams County have worked since 2016 to preserve for farming, local food and agritourism. This is where farm stands and acreage properties are, and where the "larger lots, agricultural zoning" side of Brighton is easiest to see. Check zoning, wells and water rights on any rural parcel.

The Weld County edge

A small slice of Brighton is in Weld County, only 365 residents in the 2020 census. If an address is on that side, Weld County assesses and bills it. Confirm the county by parcel.

What does it cost to own a home in Brighton?

Same rule as the rest of the metro: know the whole monthly payment, not just the price.

- **Property tax:** Adams County assesses almost all of Brighton. Use the Adams County Assessor's property search, then the county's mill levy report, to see every taxing district for a parcel. The Weld County Assessor covers the small Weld portion.
- **Metro district:** Most newer neighborhoods sit inside one. The district borrowed to build streets, parks and utilities, and a mill levy on your property tax bill pays it back, sometimes a large one. It shows up on the tax bill, not on an HOA statement. Get the number before you offer.
- **HOA:** Some communities run covenants through the metro district (Brighton Crossings does); others have a separate HOA. Ask which, and what it covers.
- **Water and sewer:** The City of Brighton runs its own water utility from 12 city wells along the South Platte and Beebe Draw, with a reverse-osmosis plant. In 2019 the city manager alleged residents had

been overcharged and the city had built up a large water surplus. The council fired him, then voted to cut water and wastewater rates starting in 2020, and voters recalled the mayor that November. The city's water treatment FAQ said its Greensand plant was near the end of its life and planned a replacement with double the capacity, due in 2025; check the city's water pages for current status. Stage 1 drought watering limits were extended through Nov. 15, 2026. Check current rates on the city's utility pages.

- **Insurance:** Hail, as everywhere on the Front Range. Ask about wind and roof age.
- **Oil and gas:** The city keeps an oil and gas FAQ. Ask about wells, pipelines and mineral rights near any parcel.
- **Sales tax:** Brighton became home rule in 2000 and collects its own sales tax. Check the city's sales tax page for the current combined rate.

What kinds of homes are in Brighton?

The north metro is a patchwork: old farmland, neighborhoods built from the 1960s to the 1980s, and newer communities with HOAs. Brighton has all three: older, smaller homes near downtown; metro-district subdivisions, with new construction still selling; and acreage and hobby-farm properties on the agricultural edges.

How do schools work in Brighton?

Brighton is served by School District 27J, headquartered in Brighton, which also covers Commerce City, Henderson, part of Thornton and part of Aurora, plus slices of Adams County, Weld County and Broomfield. Enrollment has grown from about 18,000 students in 2018 to about 23,000 (district figure).

The thing to know first: since August 2018, 27J has run a four-day school week with Mondays off. The district adopted it after six failed bond elections, to save money and recruit teachers. In 2018 the district began offering fee-based childcare on Mondays; check 27J's Child Care page for current details. Some families love the three-day weekend; for two working parents it's a real logistics question.

The district's high schools are Brighton High School, Prairie View High School and Riverdale Ridge High School, which opened in Thornton in 2018. Rocky Vista High School in Commerce City and Talon Ridge Middle School in Thornton open in fall 2027, and new middle and high school boundaries take effect then. As of May 2026, the district said its online boundary locator had not yet been updated for 2027-28. Check both years' maps for any address.

27J also authorizes charter schools, including Eagle Ridge Academy (grades 9–12) and Bromley East Charter School (K–8), both in Brighton. Colorado has open enrollment. Check 27J's Choice of Schools page for the 2027-28 enrollment window. Check the specific address with the district before you write an offer.

What is there to do in Brighton?

Parks, trails and open space

The city reports more than 1,096 acres of parkland and open space, 43 developed parks, 20 athletic fields and 48 miles of paved and soft-surface trails. Benedict Park has disc golf, the Happy Tails Dog Park is off-leash, and Ken Mitchell Open Space is part of the system. The Brighton Recreation Center on North 11th Avenue has a leisure pool, lap swim, classes and leagues. The Brighton Oasis Family Aquatic Park is the city's summer water park; it was closed for the 2026 season.

Barr Lake State Park, southeast of town, is 2,715 acres around a reservoir, with an 8.8-mile trail circling the lake and more than 370 bird species recorded (CPW). Bald eagles winter there, and the southern half is a wildlife refuge with a nature center. As of fall 2026, boating was closed for the rest of the season because of low water, and the reservoir was under a toxic-algae alert.

Farms and the fair

The farm heritage is still visible. Berry Patch Farms is a certified organic farm with pick-your-own berries in season. Lulu's Farm specializes in green and red chile, and Palizzi Farm holds a Corn and Chile Festival in September. The city-owned Bromley-Koizuma-Hishinuma Farm, on the National Register since 2007, tells the story of the area's ranchers and Japanese American farming families. Adams County's 1,197-acre Riverdale Regional Park in Brighton hosts the Adams County Fair; the 2026 fair ran July 29 to Aug. 2.

Events and the arts

The Armory Performing Arts Center was built as a National Guard armory in the early 1920s and reopened as a theater after a 2009 renovation; it hosts concerts, local theater and family shows. The city's calendar includes Summerfest, the Flix & Kicks summer series, the Fourth of July, a Thanksgiving Turkey Trot and the Festival of Lights Parade, set for Dec. 12, 2026.

Three places to start

- **Main and Bridge streets downtown:** walk the historic blocks and stop in the old Hughes Train Station, now the visitor center. This is the small-town downtown Brighton is known for.
- **Barr Lake State Park:** the lake loop, the nature center and, in winter, the eagles.
- **Riverdale Regional Park during the Adams County Fair:** the clearest look at Brighton's farm-town roots.

Who are the big employers in and near Brighton?

As the county seat, Brighton is home to the Adams County Government Center, the Justice Center and other county offices. School District 27J is headquartered here. Platte Valley Hospital, part of

Intermountain Health since the 2022 SCL Health merger, has served Brighton since 1960 and moved to its current campus in 2007. Vestas builds wind-turbine nacelles at its Brighton factory; it announced in 2021 that blade production would consolidate in Windsor, and in 2023 it announced a Brighton expansion.

How does Brighton compare with nearby areas?

- **Brighton vs. Thornton:** Thornton is closer to Denver and has the N Line, but in my view it lacks a central downtown. Brighton gives you the downtown and more land, traded for a longer drive and no train.
- **Brighton vs. Northglenn:** Northglenn is closer in, with older brick homes and few HOAs. Brighton has more new construction and many more metro districts.
- **Brighton vs. Erie:** Both are farther-out towns with real downtowns. Erie sits between Boulder and I-25, split between Boulder and Weld counties; Brighton is almost entirely in Adams County and closer to the airport.
- **Brighton vs. Commerce City:** Commerce City shares 27J and the four-day week and sits between Brighton and Denver, with a shorter drive in. Brighton has the historic downtown and the county seat.

A lender's take on Brighton

My short version is the one I gave on camera: Brighton is for people who want actual space, with larger lots, agricultural zoning and a true small-town downtown, and it has a lot going for it. The honest trade is the commute, about 45 minutes and probably an hour in heavy traffic, and some edges that feel a bit on the industrial fringe.

Buying in Brighton: what to do first

1. **Get pre-approved** before you tour. New-construction phases and builder incentives move on their own timelines.
2. **Price the whole payment:** Adams County property tax for the exact parcel, the metro district levy, any HOA dues, insurance and city water and sewer.
3. **Confirm the county and school boundaries for the exact address**, including 27J's 2027-28 maps, and plan for Mondays if you have school-age kids.
4. **Drive the commute at rush hour** from the actual neighborhood, I-76 or US 85, and time the RX bus if you'd ride it.
5. **On rural or edge parcels, check zoning, wells, water rights, oil and gas activity and nearby industrial uses.**

6. **Veterans:** a VA loan works on new construction, including builder contracts, and on metro district properties. Acreage and agricultural-zoned homes need a closer look at the appraisal and property requirements, so ask before you write an offer.

Frequently asked questions

Is Brighton, Colorado in Adams County or Weld County?

Mostly Adams County. Brighton is the Adams County seat, and in the 2020 census, 39,718 of its 40,083 residents lived on the Adams side and 365 in Weld County.

How far is Brighton from Denver?

Brighton is northeast of downtown Denver. Plan on about 45 minutes by car, closer to an hour in heavy traffic, via I-76 or US 85.

Is there light rail or a train in Brighton?

No. RTD's RX express bus runs weekdays from the US 85 & Bridge St Park-n-Ride to downtown Denver, and the 145X goes to Denver International Airport. The nearest rail is the N Line at Eastlake/124th in Thornton.

What school district is Brighton in?

School District 27J, which also serves Commerce City, Henderson and parts of Thornton and Aurora. Its high schools include Brighton, Prairie View and Riverdale Ridge, with Rocky Vista opening in 2027. Check the specific address before you buy.

Does Brighton have a four-day school week?

Yes. 27J moved to a four-day week with Mondays off in August 2018, after six failed bond elections. In 2018 the district began offering fee-based childcare on Mondays; check 27J's Child Care page for current details.

Do Brighton homes have metro district taxes?

Many newer ones do. The city counted 40 metro districts as of 2022, including Brighton Crossings, Bromley Park, Brighton Ridge and Prairie Center. Each adds a levy to the property tax bill, so check the parcel.

Does Brighton have a downtown?

Yes. Historic Downtown Brighton on Main and Bridge streets has brick buildings dating to the 1890s, the old Hughes Train Station (now the visitor center) and the Armory Performing Arts Center nearby.

Sources

Guide reviewed October 24, 2026, and reviewed again twice a year.

- Brighton, Colorado (population, county split, county seat, home rule, incorporation, elevation, Vestas, Prairie Center)
- Brighton Cultural Arts Commission: Historical Background for Founders Plaza (Hughes Station, Carmichael, incorporation, county seat, Great Western Sugar, Kuner, the Armory)
- Greater Brighton 2024 Official Visitors Guide: Discover Historic Downtown (Main Street buildings, Hughes Train Station)
- Greater Brighton 2024 Official Visitors Guide: Discover Brighton Farms (Berry Patch, Lulu's, Palizzi, Historic Splendid Valley)
- City of Brighton: News (data center moratorium, Stage 1 drought restrictions, Turkey Trot, Oct. 2026)
- Denver7: Plans for data center campus in Brighton halted (Oct. 2026)
- City of Brighton: Parks and Recreation (acreage, parks, fields, trails)
- City of Brighton: Recreation Center
- City of Brighton: Brighton Oasis Family Aquatic Park (closed for 2026 season)
- City of Brighton: Bromley Farm / Koizuma-Hishinuma Farm
- City of Brighton: Special Events
- City of Brighton: 2026 Events (Festival of Lights Parade date)
- City of Brighton: Holiday Events
- City of Brighton: Long-Range Planning (comprehensive plan update, Historic Splendid Valley, Oil and Gas FAQs)
- City of Brighton: Metropolitan Districts (40 districts as of 2022, development groupings)
- City of Brighton: Sales Tax and Business Licensing (home rule 2000, self-collected)
- City of Brighton: Water (wells, South Platte and Beebe Draw, reverse osmosis)
- City of Brighton: Water Treatment Plant FAQs (Greensand plant age, double-capacity replacement, 2025 target)
- Denver7: Brighton City Council fires city manager who alleged water overcharges (2019)
- CBS Colorado: Brighton Mayor Ken Kreutzer out after recall vote (Nov. 2019)
- CBS Colorado: Brighton City Council votes to cut water rates (Nov. 2019)
- Brighton Crossings Metropolitan Districts: About (operations board, amenities, covenants, levy on Adams County bill)
- Bromley Park Metropolitan District No. 2: District Documents
- Brighton Ridge Metropolitan District No. 1: Transparency Notice (Adams County)
- Prairie Center Metropolitan Districts: Governance
- BizWest: Prairie Center in Brighton brings retail, housing (2017)
- Adams County Assessor
- Adams County: how taxing authorities and mill levies work (request the Mill Levy Report for the full list)
- Weld County Assessor
- Adams County: Building Locations (Government Center and Justice Center in Brighton)
- Adams County: Adams County Fair 2026 (dates, Riverdale Regional Park)
- Adams County Fair: Riverdale Regional Park master plan and name (1,197 acres)
- Intermountain Health: Platte Valley Hospital, About (history)

- Denver Gazette: Vestas laying off 450 in Colorado (Feb. 2021; blades to Windsor, Brighton nacelle plant stays)
- Manufacturing Dive: Vestas to invest \$40M in two Colorado factories (July 2023; Brighton Nacelles)
- Vestas: Join the Vestas Manufacturing Team (Brighton Nacelles factory)
- School District 27J (high schools, charter schools)
- School District 27J: Find My School, Boundary Maps
- School District 27J: New 2027-2028 high school and middle school boundary maps released (May 2026)
- 27J Schools (communities served, enrollment, four-day week)
- 9News: School District 27J officially moves to a four-day school week (2018)
- Mile High CRE: New high school in Thornton opens (Riverdale Ridge, Aug. 2018)
- Colorado League of Charter Schools: Eagle Ridge Academy
- Colorado League of Charter Schools: Bromley East Charter School
- RTD: Route RX Brighton/Denver Express schedule, effective Sept. 27, 2026
- RTD: Ready for a getaway? RTD has airport connections (March 2026; 145X from Brighton)
- RTD: FlexRide (Brighton on-demand service)
- N Line (RTD) (Eastlake/124th terminus, planned extension to Highway 7)
- Interstate 76 (Colorado–Nebraska) (Brighton exits)
- E-470 (Brighton-area interchanges, Peña Boulevard, tolling)
- Colorado State Highway 7 (160th Avenue through Brighton, Baseline Road)
- CDOT: I-76 and Bridge Street Environmental Assessment and FONSI
- Rep. Gabe Evans: FY2026 funding request, I-76 and Bromley Lane (May 2025)
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife: Barr Lake State Park (acreage, 371+ bird species, eagles, 2026 boating closure)
- Barr Lake State Park (8.8-mile loop, wildlife refuge)
- The Armory Performing Arts Center
- Erie, Colorado (Boulder and Weld counties)
- Destination Denver Colorado: The Best Suburbs North of Denver | Moving to Colorado (July 2025)

A note from Jimmy

I'm a mortgage loan originator with the Everetts Lending Team at Edge Home Finance, licensed across Colorado, and I make these guides because the first thing most people need isn't a loan; it's a straight answer about where they're going. When you're ready to talk numbers, or you just want a second opinion on a neighborhood, reach out.

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