



Urban Land Institute (ULI) Building Healthy Places Workshop Report

South Academy Corridor, Colorado Springs



December 1, 2016

Funded by a grant through
The Colorado Health Foundation



The Colorado
Health Foundation™

Hosted by



YMCA of the Pike's Peak Region

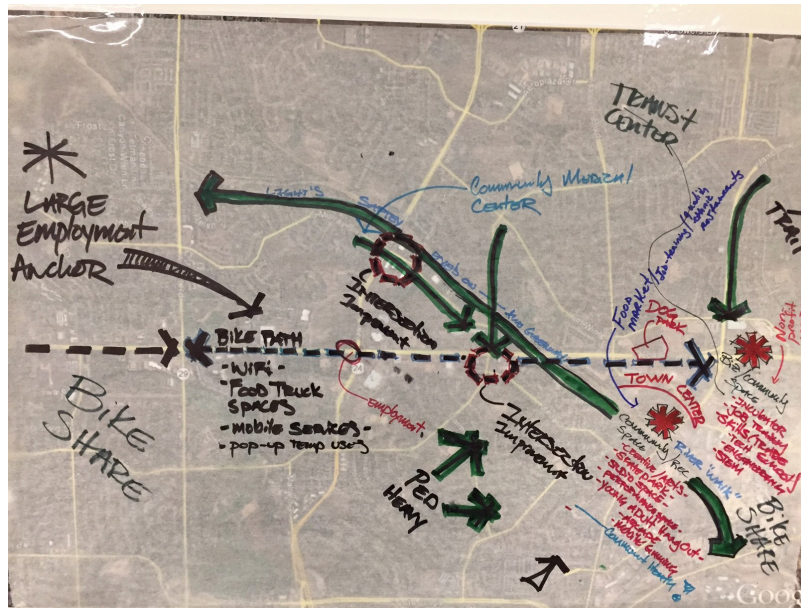


Urban Land
Institute

Colorado

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Workshop sketch shows possibilities for new transit, bike and walking connections in the study area.

I. Overview

With funding from the Colorado Health Foundation and support from the YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region, the Colorado District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI Colorado) hosted a Building Healthy Places (BHP) workshop for the South Academy Boulevard area of Southeast Colorado Springs on December 1, 2016.

The global Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a 501-c-3 nonprofit research and education nonprofit supported by 40,000 members representing the spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

In partnership with The Colorado Health Foundation, ULI has become a leader in best practices to create healthy and sustainable places—communities where all residents can enjoy active lifestyles, access to healthy food, clean air and water, green space and natural systems, and a safe community supporting physical and mental health.

This workshop brought together ULI volunteer experts with community leaders and other stakeholders to envision new designs, developments and infrastructure that will

benefit community health. The one-day workshop provided observations, findings, recommendations, and practical first and next steps in retrofitting or designing the built environment to enhance community health and wellness.

Areas of focus included active transportation (walking and bicycling) and access to transit, access to healthy food, strengthening community cohesion, economic development, and improved public safety.

ULI Colorado volunteer experts worked with community leaders to examine potential catalytic parcels and their surrounding land uses. They found the potential for public investment (both municipal and philanthropic) combined with robust resident involvement to improve Southeast Colorado Springs' physical environment.

Sponsoring organization: The Colorado Health Foundation

The Colorado Health Foundation (TCHF) is a nonprofit organization that engages through grant making, public policy and advocacy, private sector engagement, strategic communications, evaluation for learning and assessment and by operating primary care residency training programs. Partners include nonprofits, health care leaders, policy makers, educators and the private sector.

The vision of TCHF is to make Colorado the nation’s healthiest state. In 2013, recognizing the connection between physical health and the built environment, TCHF launched the Building Healthy Places Initiative with the Urban Land Institute. This has resulted in influential national ULI advisory panels in Arvada, Denver and Lamar; a series of new publications on principles and best practices; and local panels in Adams County, Colorado Springs, Denver, Edwards, Loveland, Pueblo, and Westminster. These advisory services have resulted in measurable physical changes in these communities that are leading to the creation of healthier places.

Host Organization:

Over the last year, through funding from the BUILD Health Challenge, the YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region in partnership with El Paso County Public Health, Penrose-St. Francis Health Services and local partners has heard from hundreds of community members living in Southeast Colorado Springs about their challenges and opportunities to improve quality of life. Through a process named Project ACCESS residents

prioritized three focus areas:

- life skills training,
- healthcare access (transportation), and
- workforce development.

Woven throughout these priorities are the overarching desires for:

- social cohesion,
- community development and pride, and
- safe gathering spaces.



II. Background: Health challenges in Colorado’s ‘15th-largest city’

As defined through the city’s Economic Opportunity Zone, the South Academy study area is about 12 square miles comprising four large subdivisions built in the 1950s and 60s, as well as shopping centers and other commercial development. About 68,000 people (roughly 12 percent of Colorado Springs’ population) live in the study area, which covers 6.2 miles of South Academy Boulevard. Taken alone, this study area would comprise Colorado’s 15th largest city.

Families living in poverty are geographically concentrated in Southeast Colorado Springs, where 24.9% of families live at or below the Federal Poverty Line. Some indicators of community distress:

- 11 – 15 percent unemployment (depending on census tract)
- Highest enrollment in Medicaid and greatest use of emergency room services
- Disproportionately high incidence of violent crime

The built environment of the South Academy study area presents psychological and physical barriers to improvement. The area is characterized by overly wide roads that are hostile to active transportation (walking and biking) and access to transit, and thus inhibit independent living by youth, seniors and others without cars.

Commercial shopping centers are spread out, partially vacant, and do not offer basic services such as health clinics, access to healthy food, or job opportunities/training for residents. The area is far from the city’s core and “off the radar” for many other residents, who may only know it by driving through to the airport. Development activity essentially stopped in the 1980s, and the study area has not aged well.

However, South Academy is also an area of thriving diversity and community pride that has recently received positive attention and investment from the City and the nonprofit sectors.

The City of Colorado Springs has deemed Southeast Colorado Springs an Economic Opportunity Zone with plans to implement strategies to encourage redevelopment along the corridor. City officials have targeted the rebuilding of the Sandcreek Police Substation (whose service area covers the target neighborhoods and, notably, has the smallest service area but the second highest number of calls in the city). Under the Academy Boulevard Corridor Great Streets Plan of 2011, the city could dedicate as much as \$50 million to streetscape improvements in the corridor. This includes efforts to bury public utilities and improve streetscapes for walkability and safety.

III. Challenges: Barriers to a Healthy Built Environment and a Healthy Community

A. Infrastructure

- South Academy and related arterials are too wide to cross comfortably on foot (six to ten lanes)
- Safety issues because of high speeds
- Long blocks, lack of shade, poor lighting, and narrow sidewalks inhibit walkability
- Transit stops are hard to reach with infrequent service (30- to 60-minute bus headways)
- Limited bike lanes, trails, shops, or racks
- Disconnected street network inhibiting pedestrian connectivity from neighborhoods to commercial uses located on Academy

B. Food access

- “Food swamp”—fast food is readily available, but access to fresh food and quality produce is limited
- Residents travel outside the neighborhood to access “quality grocery stores”

C. Social issues

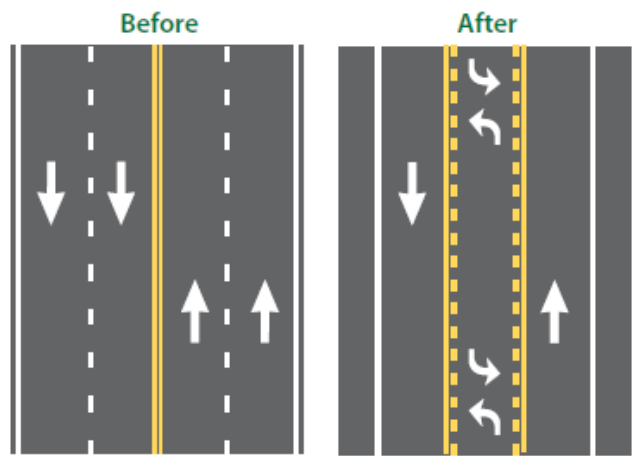
- High crime with perception of slow police response
- High unemployment with lack of job training, incubation spaces or entry-level jobs
- Lack of accessible health care service
- Lack of leadership/advocacy within community
- Perception of disenfranchised population
- Lack of youth engagement/opportunities for job training, skilled trade education and entrepreneurship

D. Housing

- Aging housing stock, often with substandard maintenance by absentee landlords
- Low home ownership

E. Sense of place

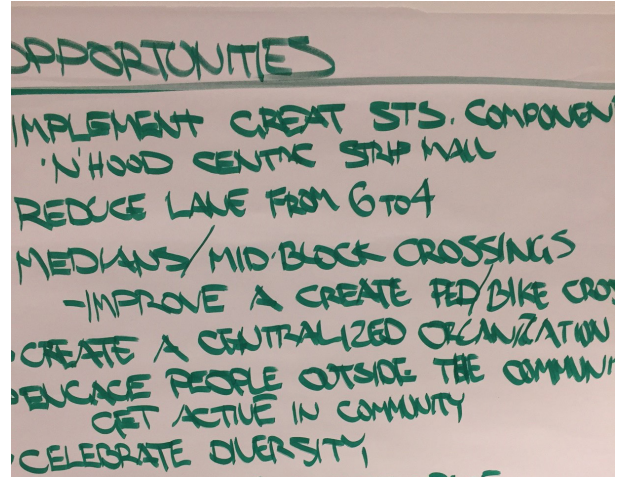
- Lack of trees for shade, beauty
- No public art
- Lack of attractive public gathering places
- Existing public places are un-activated
- No spaces for community events/gatherings
- Commercial business set far from the roadway due to the utility easement adjacent to the roadway



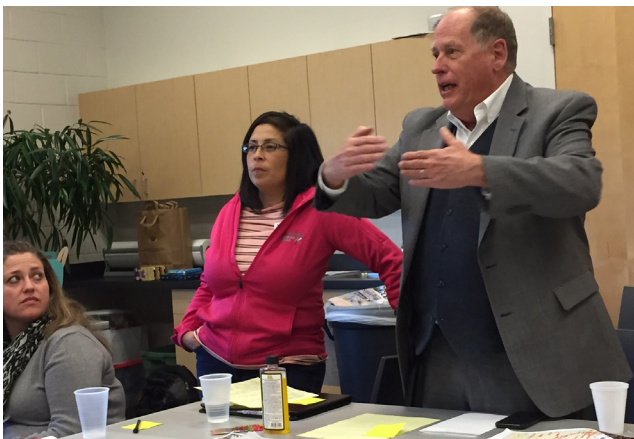
In University Place, Washington, a Tacoma suburb, the arterial road Bridgeport Place was reconstructed for 1.5 miles to reduce auto lanes while adding bike and pedestrian facilities and attractive landscaping. The county’s most heavily used road has been reborn as a safe Main Street for the community. Average speed declined, accidents dropped by 60 percent, and pedestrian counts increased dramatically. Diagram shows a blueprint for a typical ‘road diet.’

IV. Opportunities

- Access to airport and Fort Carson offers potential for economic development
- Inexpensive real estate offers potential for new investment/incubator space/start-up businesses
- The area encompasses a high number of recreational investments – connection of facilities could assist in leveraging the opportunities these present for community development
- Underused trail and open space
- Potential for a trail/enhanced open space in 100-foot power line right of way
- On the east side of the utility easement is 600 acres of undeveloped land connected to utilities
- Gravel mine south of Hancock is potential development area for recreation
- Kitchen facilities at Silver Key (senior services provider) are underused and could be repurposed for culinary training and other community activities
- Neighborhoods are not “NIMBY” – residents welcome change
- Study area is on City’s “radar”



Mountain bike rallies for kids provide one example of a community activity that the corridor can host.



When made available, culinary kitchens can host job training programs and community events.

V. Workshop Analysis and Recommendations

1. Development recommendations

This will be the biggest challenge given a generation of disinvestment. Start here:

- Study creation of a “lead entity” to advocate for and coordinate change in the study area. This could be a community development corporation, special improvement district, redevelopment authority, business district, or urban renewal district.
 - o Although creating any of the above will not be easy, special districts and authorities can guide a development vision and provide financial tools to help make it happen.
 - o If looking toward an urban renewal district, press the city to commission a “blight study,” a necessary first step.
- The vacancies in Mission Trace are a good possibility for a mixed-use redevelopment. The former King Soopers building (which is deed restricted and cannot become another grocery store) could potentially be repurposed for mixed-use development or as a job-training center.
- Other underused properties in the study area can provide inexpensive space for job training, development, and incubation. The Economic Opportunity Zone provides incentives for such uses.
- The former Sam’s Club building could be repurposed to attract manufacturing.
- The undeveloped 600 acres next to the utility easement has potential for housing development (but not for commercial since it is too far from main roads).
- Create temporary “pop-up” events, even in parking lots, that demonstrate the community’s cultural diversity and pride, and show potential for permanent public gathering spaces (see below).

2. Community leadership/activity recommendations

Build support and leadership both city-wide and within the study area. Tactics could include:

- Build relationships with local media, the City of Colorado Springs and the larger Colorado Springs community to begin changing perception of this study area (branding, outreach and community events)

- Launch a summer festival to highlight the area’s ethnicity and diversity.
- Start lunchtime pop-up events in a parking lot. Examples: dance festival, chalk art festival, health fair/clinic.
- Neighborhood clean-up days that could include tree planting.
- In general, more activities for youth: dance, skate park, fat tire festival along Sand Creek.
- Create community Wi-Fi.
- Launch a partnership with a major local employer like USAA and defense contractors to provide jobs/skills training such as programming/coding.
- Start a public mural program employing local artists/students to beautify blank walls and other dead spaces.
- Encourage youth entrepreneurship by providing space and resources in underused commercial and community spaces.



Started in 1986 as to combat graffiti, Philadelphia’s MuralArts has grown into a city-wide program that celebrates local history, people, and culture, while beautifying dead spaces like vacant buildings and walls facing parking lots. The program employs 300 artists a year. Each mural costs \$10-\$15,000.

3. Infrastructure recommendations

Implement the South Academy Great Streets plan, including:

- Narrowing Academy to four lanes to allow for protected bike lanes.
- Inventory gaps in sidewalks, street medians and street crossings to identify infrastructure investments to alleviate connectivity issues.

- Study and promote safe routes to walk to school.
- Add landscaped medians strategically to South Academy.
- Study timing of traffic signals to improve pedestrian safety and convenience.
- Repurpose land under the utility corridor as a greenway to serve new and existing residents.

4. Healthy Food recommendations

- Partner with Silver Key to provide culinary training/ services/social gatherings at underutilized kitchen (open only 5:30 am to 1:30 pm).
- Look for sites to launch community-based outdoor and greenhouse urban agriculture (in greenways, ideally).

5. Healthy Lifestyle Recommendations

- Create a community health clinic at a strategic location to be integrated with future recreational and job-training facilities

6. Next Steps

Workshop participants concluded that many of these proposed steps are inexpensive. Many neighborhood strategies can be started and implemented almost right away. It will be up to

community leaders to organize, take action, and to keep local government, nonprofits and foundations engaged in logistical and financial support every step of the way.

The community’s longer-term goal of reversing years of disinvestment, attracting economic development, and ultimately improving the built environment for the health of its residents will not be achieved until the South Academy study area starts to improve its public image and perception. It is imperative that the community continue to engage with the City of Colorado Springs to realize the City’s commitments for the area.

Finally, one day is an eyeblink when planning the future of a community of 68,000 residents. The sponsors of this workshop are strongly advised to apply for a national ULI Building Healthy Places Advisory Panel when applications become available in mid-2017. With funding through The Colorado Health Foundation, ULI will select four Colorado communities to participate in week-long Advisory Panels composed of volunteer experts in the fields of real estate, planning, transportation, urban design, and public health. The panel will also work with a broad group of stakeholders ensuring that the South Academy study area continues to receive the attention, support, and expert guidance it needs and deserves.

For more information, go to <http://uli.org/research/centers-initiatives/building-healthy-places-initiative/>



Located in an aging Boulder shopping center with cheaper rents, Block 1750 is a nonprofit dance studio and community center that serves hundreds of youth who learn hip-hop, jazz dance and more. Block 1750 launched its start-up through a Kickstarter fundraising campaign.



VI. Stakeholders Participating in the Workshop

Char Waters, YMCA Chief Healthcare Strategist
Daren Girling, YMCA Sports Director and resident of the project area
Lorri Orwig, Silver Key
Taj Stokes, pastor and resident of project area, founder of THRIVE! entrepreneur program and interested in a community hub space
John Olson, landscape architect and founder of Colorado Springs Urban Intervention
Patience Kabwasa, Colorado Springs Food Rescue
Randy Hylton, Peak Vista (FQHC)
Jeannie Orozco, Project ACCESS Coordinator
Carl Schueler, City Comprehensive Planner
Janet Brugger, Black Chamber of Commerce and partner on RISE
Catherine Duarte, City CDBG office
Jariah Walker, City Economic Development and Urban Renewal Authority President (co-founder of THRIVE!)
Abby Simpson, Pikes Peak Library District
Ruth Markwardt, Colorado College grad working with Concrete Couch (creating placemaking org)
Kelley Vivian, El Paso County Public Health
Eve Kutchman, Childrens Hospital
Carly Hoff, Regional Business Alliance (Chamber of Commerce)
Matt Kubus, Local architect
David Deitemeyer, City Parks
Craig Blewitt, Mountain Metro Transit
Bernie Banuelos, CSPD community outreach

Courtney Stone, Community Organizer, The Independence Center
Sophie Javna, Food Policy Advisory Board
Chris Jenkins, Nor'wood Development Group
Jill Gaebler, Colorado Springs City Councilmember
Claire Anderson, Innovations in Aging Collaborative
Christine Matheny, Community Health Partnership
Sara Poe, Council of Neighbors and Organizations
Kelley Vivian, El Paso County Public Health
Aubrey Day, YMCA Population Wellness



VII. ULI Colorado workshop volunteers



J.J. Folsom (chair), AICP, Senior Associate, Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.). J.J. leads placemaking, planning and design services to create healthy places and more livable downtowns. He facilitates community outreach processes, conducts quantitative and qualitative best practice research and participates in strategic planning projects. A seasoned urban designer and transportation planner, J.J. brings 20 years of experience that includes transit oriented development, downtown planning, streetscape design, complete streets and alternative transportation projects. J.J. has worked in several of Colorado's most respected transportation planning and urban design consulting firms, including Charlier Associates, Civitas and MIG. J.J. is an active member of ULI Colorado, a board member of Downtown Colorado Inc., and serves on the City of Denver Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Committee. He holds a master's degree in urban and regional planning from the University of Colorado Denver and a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Arizona.

Katherine Cornwell is the principal of a private consulting practice in Denver. Over the past two decades she served as Planning Director for Madison, Wisconsin, and held senior planning and policy advisor positions in Louisville, Kentucky, Denver, and Seattle. Katherine is a graduate of the University of Colorado and a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Accredited Professional through the US Green Building Council.





Darsey Nicklasson, Proprietor of DHN Planning & Development. Nicklasson and fellow Colorado Springs resident and partner Kathy Loo recently completed Blue Dot Place, a 33-unit apartment building and retail space in downtown Colorado Springs. Blue Dot Place opened January 2016 and is fully occupied. Nicklasson grew up in small towns in Montana and Colorado, but fell in love with an urban lifestyle while living in Washington, D.C. Upon receiving a master’s degree in urban planning and historic preservation from the University of Maryland, she worked as a community planner on significant urban infill projects in D.C. area. In 2013, she partnered with Kathy Loo to develop Blue Dot Place. They both saw the need and demand to create a lively and dynamic downtown Colorado Springs by adding new housing options. Nicklasson and Loo place a strong focus on community building and sustainable development. A downtown Colorado Springs resident, Nicklasson lives with her husband, Rob, and three beautiful children. She enjoys traveling, city exploring, camping, rock climbing, mountain biking and just signed on to compete in triathlon in the fall. She prefers biking to work and meetings and only drives a car when absolutely required.

Will Wagenlander is a lead urban designer and planner with WSP | Parson Brinkerhoff’s PlaceMaking group. Will has extensive experience in project management, small area plans, multi-modal corridor and street planning, complete street design, sustainable infrastructure rating systems, site design, implementation of green streets concepts, multi-modal transportation planning (bike, pedestrian and vehicular), urban design standards and regulations, transit oriented development, land-use planning, streetscape design, and mixed-use design. He also has extensive experience in community outreach and plan presentation to decision makers including interactive public charrette design processes.



VIII. Overview of ULI Colorado Advisory Services



In 2013, recognizing the connection between physical health and the built environment, TCHF launched the Building Healthy Places Initiative with the Urban Land Institute. This has resulted in influential national ULI advisory panels in Arvada, Denver and Lamar; a series of new publications on principles and best practices; and local panels in Adams County, Colorado Springs, Denver, Edwards, Loveland, Pueblo, and Westminster. Already these advisory services have resulted in measurable physical changes leading to the creation of healthier places.

The Colorado District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI Colorado) is the 1,300-member field office of the global ULI, a 501-c-3 nonprofit dedicated to best practices in land use. ULI Colorado mobilizes the volunteer skills of members from 26 different professions for the betterment of careers and communities. ULI’s key issues included affordable housing, building healthy places, diversity, economic revitalization, transit-oriented development, and compact, walkable development. ULI Colorado is led by volunteer chair Amy Cara, a partner in East West Denver. The staff includes executive director Michael Leccese, manager Sarah Franklin, and associate Charles Allison-Godfrey. ULI Colorado conducts 40+ programs a year including panel discussions, project tours, advisory services, mentoring and leadership, community service and publications.

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