

Old Colorado City Redevelopment (3)

Category: Old Colorado City Redevelopment - (1976-1985)

Published: Thursday, 17 November 2011 16:32

Written by dave

Hits: 3245

Other Consequences of Redevelopment

As I mentioned in the previous summary of my involvement in the Old Colorado City Commercial area, the entire Westside had been, by 1975 declared a city area of Slum and Blight.

I heard this one day when I sat in after being invited as the Chairman of the Centennial-Bicentennial Committee to a Human Relations Commission meeting. Jim Ringe, head of the City's 'Community Development' department made a presentation just before mine. I heard him say that the city was discussing the possibility of putting \$250,000 in Bloc Grant funds into the depressed "Westside." I already knew, from the approaches by Luther McKnight and Leroy Ellinwood to my Centennial Committee to see if we could do 'something for Old Town' they were only thinking about doing something 'historical.'

So I looked up the 1970 Census for the tracts on the Westside (which had about 800 homes and small business structures with about 18,000 people. I saw that its average income was only 2/3ds the rest of the city. It was in decline. As I later learned, in part because its central artery - Colorado Avenue - having been US 24 West from the day it was founded in 1859 - it had been the ONLY way to and from the Mountains up and down Ute Pass. The City asked the State to switch US 24 to the 'Midland Expressway' - the old Midland Railroad bed the other side of Fountain Creek, effectively bypassing the Westside and its only opportunity for Tourist business. But I knew from Ellinwood and McKnight it had history under the grime and blight- lots of Frontier history. Now the City was apparently willing to put some HUD Block Grant money into its blighted area, that the city itself helped create - by getting the state to move US24, away from it by 1963.

1+1+1 equaled 3 for my money, so I glimpsed a fleeting opportunity to get involved by linking the westside's need for economic - not just welfare - development, the desire by people - getting away from Big City, Big Business, Big Government - coming to Colorado Springs to find business opportunity in a smaller city, and the kind of entrepreneurship that Nasbit's 'Megatrends' predicted would be coming in the wake of big changes - the '60s, and latent history - architectural as well as narrative. And money available to make it happen synergistically. In my mind's eye I saw opportunity, not decline.

Once again my chronic 'futures' mind, my mental aggregating ability, my Celtic imagination, all kicked in. I saw a new future out of the past for a whole side of town - that might value history when greater Colorado Springs had already shown it not only ignored its own, but destroyed what little there was left. But I also knew I would have to lead the way - charge the hill just as I did in Korea.

The city had already started to declare and boundary - as the 'Westside Strategy Area - the area astride Colorado Avenue embracing 8,000 homes and over 20,000 residents. Within those boundaries according to HUD rules the neighborhoods were eligible for the expenditure of Bloc Grant Funds. The map below shows the larger boundary, the small commercial area, and then something called the Westside Study Area. Which I will explain below.

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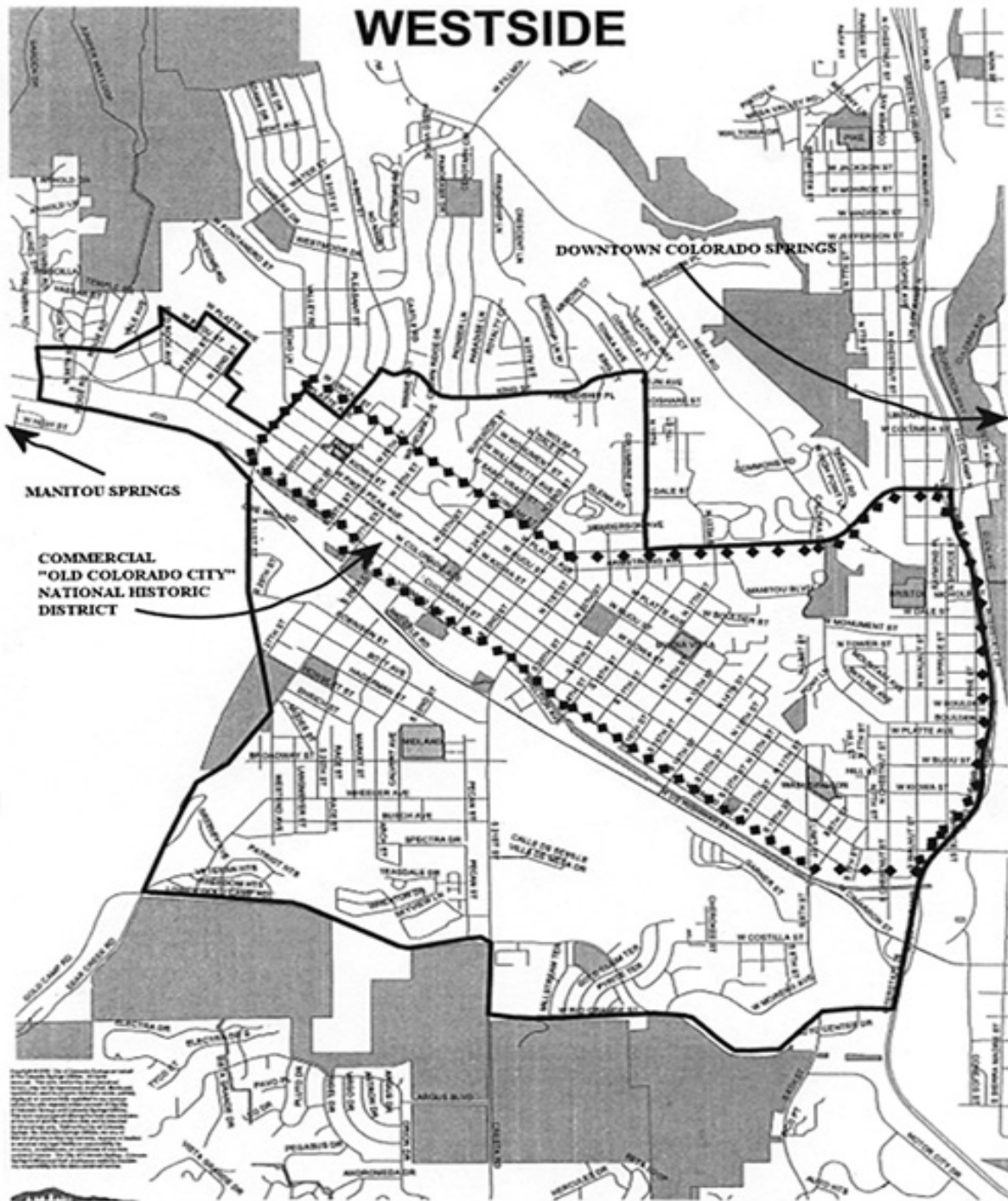


Figure 1 - Westside Study Area

The dark black line is the overall Westside Strategy Area, where HUD programs could be used. The smaller Westside Study Area containing most of the 1880s to 1900s homes which were proposed later to the City to be photographed and studied to become a local City 'Historic Overlay Zone'.

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When the city declared the total area a HUD Westside Strategy Area making it eligible for Bloc Grant funds for housing rehab, economic development (which was aimed at the Colorado Avenue commercial corridor) and infrastructure upgrading (curbs, gutters, sidewalks and other things) it was required by HUD to prove it had consulted with the neighbors who would be affected by any changes. The City needed an organized way to do that over such a large area with over 20,000 'neighbors'.

So I helped launch the Organization of Westside Neighbors (OWN) in 1978, and persuaded a 'community' oriented man - Bob Traer - to become its first President. He was a Lutheran Church administrator (he later became president of the largest School District - 11 - in Colorado Springs and owned a home in the 800 Block of Kiowa.) I was eligible to head OWN up myself being, since 1977, a homeowner on the Westside, but since I was focused on getting the 'Old Colorado City' commercial district viable, I only agreed to become a Board Member. (twice later, I was willing also to be its Treasurer).

OWN became THE most consulted - by the city - for all government matters inside the Strategy Area. Its members were elected from westside homeowners or residents. Some were elected At Large, others from smaller OWN neighborhood 'Districts.' It never was a fund raising, large project, organization nor with offices - for its Board simply met in city or school facilities. It was really just an 'advisory' - to city government - neighborhood organization. But it had a budget, for the City, using Bloc Grant funds 'contracted' with OWN to write and distribute a non-profit newspaper 'Westside Story' which contained announcements by the city desiring to get feedback on its rehab plans. OWN wrote its own 'neighborhood' news, announced decisions and recommendations it had made especially on matters brought to it by the city on proposed projects. It could sell ads and get a little income. But its bread and butter was the annual Contract with the City, for about \$8,000 a year so it could print the 4 page paper, and have it mailed into the mailboxes of all 8,000 homes and 800 businesses at least quarterly. And in its required HUD feedback reports - OWN advised the city of problems that it could address. The City was always careful to get the 'opinion' of OWN - and hopefully its endorsement, of city planner proposed changes on the westside - from road realignments to rezoning actions. Which endorsement it would always state to the Planning Commission and City Council when the Staff was on their agenda, especially on controversial issues.

The Neighborhood Housing Project - NHS

In the mid 1980s a national organization called the NHS came to Colorado Springs to see if there was any interest in using its services to help rehabilitate run down housing areas. It had been successful in cities like Pueblo, getting Savings and Loan Banks (S&L) or other organizations to put up some funds, to make housing improvement, or purchase loans at favorable rates - all to upgrade depressed housing areas in central cities.

There was little interest in the tight fist financial organizations of Colorado Springs in such a program. But I suggested through OWN that the same formula I had used to capitalize business in the Old Colorado City - use Bloc Grant funds as the 'seed' or underlying loan for a home with a Second Mortgage to entice Banks or S&Ls to make the balance of the Loan for rehab or to entice purchase by moderate income people (not the poor - or affluent). Since all the homes inside the Neighborhood Strategy Area were eligible for Bloc Grant funds, that might work there.

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Low interest Bloc Grant Loan plus affordable bank loans extended to moderate income people to move to the Westside and increase home ownership, while improving their properties - including by retaining the historical architectural look of the home that would increase their property values and thus help generally upgrade the 'blighted' part of town.

It did. The model I had created for funding the redevelopment of the commercial district - Old Colorado City - and the rest of Colorado Avenue from 8th Street to 32d Streets - worked for scores of westsiders and would-be westsiders. Block grant + bank loans for extensive rehab work on existing homes or purchase of other homes. That NHS project added to the City's own programs for improving the homes of very low income - generally older - westsiders worked for a few years. The combination helped one other thing to happen too. As Colorado Springs grew, the 'in thing' for those who were not keen to live in typical tract, or new subdivisions, was to buy an 1890's westside home and either fix it up or enhance its original architectural appeal. Historic preservation started coming to the one-time blighted residential area. The marketplace began to work on its own.

During that period I got involved with a dispute with City staffers when they were engaged in upgrading really run down homes using HUD programs that were essentially aimed at doing JUST essential work - like shoring up house foundations, plumbing, electrical, siding or roofs - for low income owners. Several westside home which, in their 1880-90s time were well designed and had many attractive historical features, were owned by people on very low income. One particular home, once named The 1884 Husted House was owned and occupied by a truck driver and his family. You could see its faded glory. It was in bad shape.

I asked the City staff, not only to do the essential safety and building code work on it but to do so on the exterior in a way that brought out by restoration its historical value.

There was an uproar, and the city staff argued ALL they were supposed to do it make the house habitable, not to preserve its architecture.

We went to the mat, and the City Manager, knowing how much I, through OWN and Old Colorado City had greatly increased the value of the properties by restoring its historical look and feel, ruled against his staff. The Husted House was repaired and its historical trim and decorative iron fence were put back in attractive shape.

In fact, the owners were able soon after to sell that home at a good price, the second owners enhanced it further, turned it into an elegant Bed and Breakfast, and its value continued to go up, until it is now an showpiece. Who said historic preservation is not for the 'poor?' Several other properties were similarly improved. This is an original photo of the Husted House - which design details have been restored today.

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The westside had thousands of less ornate, but nevertheless houses with a 'period' look, that became more and more attractive to young people looking for their first - and affordable - home.

In some ways the house we moved into from the totally 'modern' eastside of the Colorado Springs was typical.

Here is Jack Ekstrom's rendition of it in 1978.

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6 North 24th Street, and its accompanying 'Cottage' at 6 1/2 North 24th Street

While looking for a westside house to move into - partly to put my 'redevelopment money where my mouth was' - invest in the westside and not just lecture in, we found this 1900 'Georgian Revival' house, with an 1884 'Cottage' in the rear. The original owner's wife had the 'cottage' as a tack-house - two stories - which could house her horse and carriage. Years later when horses were passe, two rooms - kitchen and bath - were added on it and it became a rental cottage - or often called a 'mother-in-law' cottage with partial addresses (6 1/2) scattered throughout the westside.

While I was warned, given my background and status in life as a retired West Point Colonel who had once lived in a mansion on Wood Avenue on 'millionaire's row' not to move into the 'run down' westside.

But I took the plunge, and we bought the entire property in 1977 for \$31,000. By the time it was paid off , the County Assessor valued it at \$207,000. After the realestate crash of 2008, it came down to just about \$200,000. Not a bad gamble, not on just the house but the effect of the broad, westside, 'redevelopment.' Its value rise, without really extensive upgrading or remodeling, mirrored thousands of other homes west of Interstate 25 and east of Manitou Springs.

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And for next 35 years our family life, raising 3 children (two of them preferring to live in the 'cottage' for a time before they all left Colorado Springs, got married, and came back, all three of them buying 'Westside Houses' and raising our 5 grandchildren, and 4 great grandchildren - all within 2 miles of our house.

So life on the 'Westside' harkened back to the days in America when houses had character, much was done by walking, and families sat on the porch.



Left to right - grandson Justin, son David, grandson David XIII, Edward - Justin and David's father - and my son in law Tom Palmedo. All on our 'porch'

The Historic Overlay Zone Project

So OWN undertook in the mid 1990s from the prodding by a number of Westside newcomers - mostly women - who generally had lived in other cities with historic residential areas, to become involved to accelerate the 'historic preservation' process.

That gave rise inside OWN to what became a 5 year effort to start a major project.

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I was quite familiar with what the city had done over the years elsewhere for residential Historic Preservation - all of which was inside the original Colorado Springs city limits. And almost solely from the initiative of residents - not from any city leader's 'vision.' In fact the City of Colorado Springs was disinterested in Historic Preservation not already undertaken by the wealthy. There was exactly 1 city staff officer - Tim Scanlon - in the City Planning Department, who provided staff support to the city appointed Historic Preservation Commission - in addition to his other planning duties. And there was an Historic Preservation Ordinance.

There were two residential 'Historic Overlay Zones' in the city - the Old North End, and the Weber-Wasatch areas.

Westiders who wanted the city to create a Westside Overlay Zone had a number of obstacles to contend with. Not the least of which was the fact that when the 'Old North End' - which included the mansions on Wood Avenue, and Cascade around Colorado College' applied for City Overlay Zone status there was a huge public controversy, and at least one law suit against the city against it.

The problem was that those who promoted the North End Historic Overlay Zone, had already gotten the 657 homes inside the area, designated as a National Historic District.

Under both the City Ordinance for Historic Preservation, and corresponding State and Federal guidelines, IF a local Historic Overlay Zone ALREADY had Federal Historic Status, then the City had the power (and obligation) - through the Historic Preservation Board - besides the usual City Building Codes - to dictate to any home owner what could or could not be altered on the exterior of the structure. Which in 'conservative' Colorado Springs became a contentious 'Property Rights Issue.'

But when I studied the fine print in the City Preservation Ordinance, it specified that if an Historic Overlay Zone was created by the city over homes which did NOT have Federal status, then the only thing that the Preservation Board could do is review the building permit, and jaw-bone the owner to persuade him or her to do the things that would preserve the historical architectural 'look' of the building. But it had no power to dictate exterior changes.

ONLY because that meant that a Westside Overlay Zone over residences would have no property rights implications, I supported the proposed Overlay Zone. And I correctly judged that there would be no outcry among westiders about the added historical overlay designation, since any owner could remodel their homes with only the City Building Codes to limit them.

For I ALSO knew that we had already established the increased value of homes on the westside which had 'historical' architectural charm, and if we brought out printed 'Design Guidelines' - many a homeowner or buyer would enhance the historical look of their homes on their own. Design guidelines could be a 'how to' book for homeowners who as often as not had carpenter-handy relatives do work on their homes - not retaining high end architectural firms.

The Proposed Overlay Zone Photographic Project

Now what had to be done inside the proposed Overlay Zone - which is shown in dotted lines

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inside the Neighborhood Strategy Area map above - for the 4,000 structures, was a photograph - front building view - of every building. That would cost money. The city would not fund it.

So I found - in 2005 - a good photographer willing to take all 4,000 digital photos for \$1.00 each. Total cost \$4,000. Since OWN did not have that kind of money, but could provide up to \$2,000 from its bank account that had paid ads in its 'Westside Story' newsletter, I went to the Old Colorado City Historical Society Board and asked it to contribute \$2,000 toward the project. I was both OWN's and OCCHS Treasurer at the time. So I knew what each could and could not, do.

The only stipulation was that, when the OWN and the City were done using the 4,000 front-house-view photos for the purpose of creating the Historical Overlay Zone, that the ownership and copyrights of all the photos belonged to OCCHS. OCCHS could use the photos to raise funds from homeowners who wanted a picture of their house, among other things.

That was agreed to, so I contracted with the Photographer and over several months time all the digital photographs, in high resolution, were accomplished.

But there were several other steps which had to be taken. To get an Historic Overlay Zone approved, especially if OWN expected - and the City Needed - to apply for a grant from the State Historical Fund (which came from Cripple Creek and Central City-Blackhawk gambling state taxes), a set of 'Design Guidelines' had to be drafted by an accomplished architect-designer with historical design experience.

Funding the Design Guidelines

I had discussed the possibility with Tim Scanlon at the City, but he and his boss were skeptical, with city funds getting tight, that the city would put up the 25% match of whatever the total grant from the state would need to be. The total cost, even if the City Printing press did the work at cost, for perhaps 3,000 copies given out free to interested Westside homeowners would approach \$40,000. One fourth of which needed for the match would be \$10,000.

But I had an idea - and I went before the City Council to request funding on behalf of OWN for the Design Guidelines - which would be, besides the photos, a prerequisite before the City would ever approve an Historic Overlay Zone over 4,000 homes.

Two things happened. First of all the Mayor objected to the whole idea of the city enacting another (besides the Old North End) Historical Overlay Zone - given the controversy over the first one (which he voted against when it came to the Council). I anticipated the 'property rights' issue. So I gave the Mayor a short course on his own City Ordinance that (1) proved there would be NO Property Rights infringed upon for the Westside and (2) there had been NO opposition to the idea by westsiders because we had educated them all over at least 3 issue of 'Westside Story' newsletter which went to every household. He did not know the implications of the City Ordinance as well as I did. So he consented.

Then I sprung the idea on them that they could take the money from the Fund built up from the fees collected when homeowners came to the Historic Preservation Board to apply for a State

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20% Income Tax Credit for over \$5,000 of historic preservation improvements to their house. Northenders were quick to get such a tax break so long as their home was in the overlay zone, and the improvements were approved by the Historic Preservation Board.

That did it. The City Council agreed after the staff had to admit it had that 'fee' fund set aside. That could be tapped to provide the 25% 'Match' of the requested state grant.

The grant was approved, and it took months of wrangling between Tim Scanlon, the State, and some OWN Board members (everyone thought they were an 'expert' in historic preservation) before the grant was approved, the city contracted with an architect, and the Design Guidelines were published.

Meanwhile, with other fish to fry, I resigned from the OWN Board and let them carry on toward an Historic Overlay project.

So the 127 page Westside Design Guidelines were done and printed, and free distributed.

For I had another hunch - that EVEN if the 'Overlay Zone never got implemented, the Design Guidelines is an excellent source for homeowners, buyers, and their architects to make their house, or its remodeling, add to, and not detract from, the historic character of the Westside.

I had done my duty in finding a way that the rest of the historic Westside of Colorado Springs was put on the path of restoring its historic character, as I had done for the Commercial area of "Old Colorado City."

One way I used to 'educate' the rest of Colorado Springs on the History of Old Colorado City was to use a unique feature of the Gazette Telegraph Newspaper called "Fresh Ink" where subscribers could write their OWN stories and weekly see the 'User Publishing' print those stories. One early Fresh Ink rant I made that was also responded to by an other paper subscriber, here it is as my first Fresh Ink offering. It is a PDF file. Just click on the title below:

[MY FIRST FRESH INK MUSING](#)

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