

Old Colorado City Redevelopment (2)

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

Published: Wednesday, 23 November 2011 13:47

Written by dave

Hits: 11965

The Maturity of 'Old Colorado City' and the Westside

By 2000 the combined successes of the Revitalization of Old Colorado City and the visible improvements throughout the residential areas of the Westside, which really only started in 1975 were fueling further progress by the actions of the unaided marketplace. There were some noteworthy benchmarks.

1. In 1975 there were only 30 viable businesses, employing only 100 persons, half of whom worked in the Snow White industrial laundry, which were retailing \$2.5 million, among the 100 buildings between 24th and 27th West Colorado Avenue, half of which - 50 - were empty. By 2000 there were 100 businesses employing 1,000 persons - including service business and offices occupying all the buildings. And retail sales were reaching \$20 million.

2. The Old Colorado City Development company made over 50 loans, none of which failed. No building were torn down, Besides having put the 50 empty buildings to profitable use - with all of them initially 'owner occupant.' Several loans were made to upgrade the interior, besides redoing many facades - bringing out the original 1890-1910 architectural details. In fact the payoff in Principal and Interest back to the city through the Development company, reached over \$1 million - which the city in turn used to help finance the rehabilitation of the 'Lowell School' project on South Nevada Avenue. And all the loans were not made just inside the 7 square Old Colorado City block area. Since any property from Colorado Avenue back to the Alley on both side of the avenue, being zoned C-5 which meant any building could be all commercial, all residential, or any combination, a number of loans were made all the way from 10th to 31st streets. Which tended to upgrade that avenue with an Historical look.

And I succeeded in getting the City Council to nominate the 7 square block area containing all 100 small-business building for National Historic District Status. Which went through (after I flew to Washington to lobby for it). So in 1982 'Old Colorado City' became the first National Historic District in Colorado Springs.

The small business lending program was so successful that there were requests for the scope of that Development Company to expand its reach throughout all of El Paso and Teller County. It did so, changing its name to 'Pikes Peak Development Company' and it still is operating with a headquarters in downtown Colorado Springs. It no longer depends on either Bloc Grant Funds or SBA Guaranteed loans. It is just successful making small business loans to a variety of applicants.

3. After I got Thayer Tutt of El Pomar to donate \$7,590 toward the upgrading of the 1859 Garvin Cabin - which he had saved in 1929 after HIS father's urging, for \$400 and put on the Golf Course of the Broadmoor until he gave it to the city in 1961 after it was used in Denver during the 1959 State Centennial, spurred the City to put \$60,000 to upgrade run down Bancroft Park. That paid for the Gazebo that is here still, a much larger concrete lab in front of the Bandshell, and general landscaping. Bancroft Park became and remains a heavily used public activity center - shows, reenactments, dances, craft fairs, contests, celebration and memorializations.

4. After EDA paid for a number of off-avenue parking lots behind the 100 stores which faced the Avenue, I persuaded over 50% of all the property owners to petition the city to form an 'Old

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Colorado City Maintenance and Security Tax District' which enclosed 7 square blocks. Thus permitting those parking lots to be 'free but controlled' without parking meters. The District paid for the maintenance of the lots, and by funding one City Park Department employee, maintenance of the paver stones before the stores, the grassy and landscaped medians, snow removal, power for the decorative street lighting. In other words I had engineered the creation of a self-taxing district that let Old Colorado City operate much like a large shopping mall - who owns its own parking lots - but where the city owns the lots - but the property owners happily pay for keeping them maintained. Wally Totten. property owner, and I actually drafted the ordinance that created the district, and we insured the District had 9 actual property owners on its 'City Council Advisory Board' to advise the city on what next year's mill levy should be to cover costs. Thus preventing the Parks Department from arbitrarily spending money in the district without answering to the 100 property owners who were paying that special tax. At the time, it was the first 'Security and Maintenance' District under state tax district laws in Colorado. It really worked and is still 2015, working, paying for with its occasional surplus, replacement decorative lighting within the Old Colorado City three block tax district, and paying for etched stone markers for the entrance to the shopping district.

Originally the 'Maintenance' portion of the District had off-duty policemen, paid for by the tax funds, patrolling the three blocks, especially through the alleys at night to both deter and detect attempted burglaries of the stores from the rear. After the first 20 years of such patrolling, the amount of crime, including teen vandalism dropped off - from the general upgrading of the district and its neighborhood ('removal' of the slum and blight) the Maintenance was no longer needed. The funds saved from the District funds were used to enhance the area - by lighting and better signs - all recommended by the District board who as property owners who were paying the tax, and deserved to be heard.

Incidentally, I got the original petition to the City signed by the substantial portion (over 90%) of the property owners by using my original Radio Shack Computer's 'Visicalc' spread sheet to calculate the total 'assessed valuation' per the County Assessors records of the sum of all the buildings within the District Boundaries (7 square blocks), then the estimated annual Maintenance and Security Cost (which was \$50,000 the first years), then dividing that by the percentage of value of each taxed property - which then gave me the actual dollar cost per year per property. I printed that out and as I 'solicited' signatures on the petition to Council to create the district I was able to say, for example to the owner of Moccasin Tipi - "For \$23.50 a month you can have, behind your store in a 'free for your customers' public lot, and at night have security patrolling, if you just sign that petition"

It was so better a deal than any building owner could do out of his own pocket, all but a few property/business owners signed the petition to raise their own taxes - because they could see the direct benefit to their property and business.

5. I worked, of course, with many City Staffers on all these projects over the years it took to turn the westside around. Jim Ringe, Peter Dobert, Bob Patoni, Bill Eberhart, Eric Swab were among them.

6. Other communities - and the State Governor - looked to the success of Old Colorado City as a model - especially for what was nationally dubbed the "Main Street" project. Which was a

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return nationally, not just to historic preservation, but to Main Street more than Suburbia and its Malls. I was flown in the Governor's Plane - with a number of others who collectively called ourselves the Main Street Group. We both looked at elements towns were doing by themselves - even not nearly as comprehensively as Old Colorado City was doing - and I picked up a number of good ideas and projects to integrate into Old Colorado City. Fort Collins, Boulder, South Denver, Grand Junction, Aurora were some of the places we visited - and told local business-government leaders how our project worked. Later I was asked to advise Florence, and Victor Colorado.

7. Manitou Springs, right next to Old Colorado City (and more than a few stores relocated to Old Colorado City from stagnant Manitou) asked for my help. I helped them become a 'Main Street' city, helped form the Manitou Development Company modeled after the Old Colorado City Development Company - landed both a state economical development grant, served on its Board for several years, and we managed, with the SBA502 program to upgrade several downtown Manitou Springs commercial buildings and kick start its own brand of redevelopment.

8. By 1995 I helped fold out of active existence the West Colorado Springs Commercial Club which had done its work during the main 'redevelopment' years 1976-1990 when no less than 35 of the 100 buildings were purchased, a company formed, and their buildings historically renovated. We were replaced by a new organization "Old Town Merchants" which concentrated on Retail Marketing, and took over the annual Memorial Day Weekend's 'Territory Days' - which, when it became a street fair drew, by 2007 140,000 people. And the largest St Patrick's Day outside of Denver took place in Old Colorado City, drawing everyone from the Lord Mayor of Dublin to the Governor of Colorado. It out grew Old Colorado City and in 2008 relocated to downtown Colorado Springs.

9. By 2010 I was generally out of activities related to Old Colorado City's commercial district. And the Old Colorado City Development Company on Wes Colbrun's retirement and death from cancer, enlarged to the Pikes Peak Development Company, moved downtown, continuing to make business loans, and covered all of El Paso and Teller Counties.

10. It is not too much to say that the redevelopment model I envisioned in 1976 and implemented became a model for many other parts of town, and other towns and cities in Colorado. It remains 'redeveloped' for good

---The End of the Federally (HUD) Financial Support for the Westside in 2014 -----

Following is an Op Ed piece I wrote for the Westside Pioneer Newspaper after the city cut off HUD funding, September, 2014, for the annual \$7,000 to the 'Organization of Westside Neighbors' (OWN) which it had relied on from 1978 when Bob Traer and I started OWN, in order to effectively communicate by quarterly printed and mailed newsletter to and from 8,000 Westside homeowners and small businesses who were inside the Redevelopment area.

Guest column: CDBG funding cutback for

Westside is a sign of success

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By Dave Hughes

While you, editor, have summarized the controversial cut-off of CDBG funding for OWN now (see [Westside Pioneer article](#)), you haven't given Westsiders a fuller explanation of how and why that funding was made in the first place. Let me fill in some blanks.

In the late 1960s, Colorado Springs became the recipient, on application, of a series of annual federal - HUD- "Community Development Block Grant" (CDBG) funds. The Springs, like many cities with deteriorating downtowns or neighborhoods, could use these funds, under Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rules, to start the revitalization of those areas.



City governments first had to declare and map out which run-down parts of town were full of "slum and blight." The city then made plans on how to bring those areas back. In some cases they declared an "urban renewal" area. Downtown Colorado Springs was so declared. And it used those funds, along with some city funds, to tear down buildings, some historic, lower the price for the land and market it to outside investors.

Downtown is still struggling to recover, economically.

The city then drew a circle around the 8,000 homes on the Westside and the 7 square block area in which 50 business buildings were empty along West Colorado Avenue, declaring it all also a slum and blighted area. For a while, Old Colorado City was declared an urban renewal area too, but we proved to City Council that our own revitalization plan (already in place, combining CDBG funds - SBA loan guarantees, and private loans) was better. The city cancelled the Westside Urban Renewal project.

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But HUD required that the city communicate to all property owners inside NSA's (neighborhood strategy areas and get their opinions on the city plans, especially the planned expenditures of block grant funds. That was easy for the downtown, as well as for the 100-plus commercial properties in the 7 square block area of Old Colorado City.

"Communicating" with the owners of 8,000 households was not going to be easy, for there were no Westside-wide homeowner organizations in the mid '70s. So Bob Traer, a homeowner on the near Westside, and I, who became a homeowner in 1977 - but was putting my energy into the commercial area - formed the Organization of Westside Neighbors in 1978.

Traer became president. The city started funding OWN with block grant funds so we could print and mail a newsletter to inform everyone inside the NSA about community development plans, hold meetings and picnics and solicit feedback. An elected OWN board, including members from six areas of the Westside, would meet, talk to the city, review its plans and represent the 8,000 homeowners. By 1980 the "Westside Plan" was adopted by city ordinance after plenty of Westsider "feedback" to the city planners.

Well, after 36 years of "redevelopment" efforts, 90 percent of which has been done by new and old homeowners and small-business persons by renovation, very little destruction, voluntary historic preservation, plus some public works and loans from annual city CDBG funds, supplemented by regular city budget items, the "Westside Plan" has worked!

Neither HUD nor the city needs to specially subsidize the Westside, Old Colorado City or OWN anymore!

Editor's note: Dave Hughes, a retired Army colonel and Westside resident, is widely credited for leading the revitalization of Old Colorado City and the Westside, starting in the late 1970s.

(Posted 9/28/14; [Opinion](#): Guest Columns

I wrote that OP-ED piece, above, because the President of OWN, Welling Clark, and his wife Sallie Clark - who was a County Commissioner representing the Westside were hard core Republicans. Presumably Conservative. Yet he was complaining about the City not continuing - forever - up to \$2.8 million Federal HUD Subsidy. I saw political hypocrisy in demanding a continuous flow of government money, even after the original subsidy had largely worked, and I saw that no more handouts were needed. And OWN should start standing on its own, financially.

Column by John Hazelhurst - native, past City Councilman, and the writer as "The Sage" in the 'alternative' City Newspaper - Colorado Springs Independent

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Old Colorado City: a downtown that works

City Sage

by John Hazlehurst

Stability and unity abound along West Colorado Avenue.

March 3d, 2016

It's 7:45 on an unseasonably warm Saturday morning. I'm walking my dog through Old Colorado City. Most of the stores are closed, but the 120-year-old commercial district is coming to life.

At Jives, a coffee shop facing Bancroft Park, a half-dozen customers enjoy the early sun. Across the street, La Baguette does a brisk business. Two blocks farther to the west, the second wave has already hit Bon Ton's Café, the west side's iconic breakfast spot, which has been open since 6.

By early afternoon, the good weather brings out dozens of strollers, potential customers for the merchants along Colorado Avenue and the side streets. The merchants are wildly diverse, an Alice's Restaurant of retail.

Want some sexy lingerie, a tattoo, a jade horse, a cool little top, a 21.7-carat aquamarine set in

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diamonds and gold, a bankruptcy lawyer, a painting, a margarita, the opportunity to make a fool out of yourself singing karaoke, a bed for the night at one of the state's finest B&Bs, gluten-free tapas, or a simple scoop of ice cream?

It's all here.

Thirty-five years ago, Colorado City was dying. The 19th-century brick commercial buildings that lined Colorado Avenue were mostly vacant and crumbling. The few businesses that remained (the much-mourned Roger's Bar among them) serviced a strictly local clientele.

According to longtime activist Dave Hughes, city bigwigs even floated a plan to tear down all the existing buildings and offer the vacant ground to a manufacturing company, which would then create jobs for all of us unemployed west-siders.

Happily, that didn't happen. Working in tandem with city officials, local businesses and property owners, Hughes conceived and implemented a plan that led to the preservation, renovation and revival of this extraordinary area. It's a story that has been told — but now it's time to ask a simple question.

Why does Old Colorado City thrive, while downtown Colorado Springs struggles? What lessons can downtown merchants and property owners learn from their counterparts two miles to the west?

"I'm always wondering what we can learn from downtown," says Laura Teeters, who owns A Call to Life, a women's clothing boutique at 25th Street and Colorado. "I never thought that we had anything to teach them. But I love being here — this is such a supportive business community. I get so many customers that other business owners refer to me, and I refer my customers to them."

Silversmith Mike Velez occupied a prime Tejon Street location for 20 years before moving to "the avenue" two years ago. He echoes Teeters' comments.

"It's great here," he says. "It's just a lot of people who are really dedicated to small retailers, and making this work for all of us."

Commercial real estate broker and gadfly City Councilor Tim Leigh takes a slightly different tack.

"They've got a great tenant mix," he says, "lots of storefronts, small, shallow spaces. Downtown has a problem because so many spaces are too big, too deep. Small retailers can't afford the dead space, so they go out to Colorado City, or Manitou. And the more retailers you have, the more foot traffic, the more sales, and everybody benefits."

Also, Leigh continues, it's not so much what Old Colorado City has that's important — it's what it doesn't have.

"There aren't any panhandlers there — or at least there's no perception that they're working the street every day. It's considered safe at night, and parking is easy. Not like downtown. I get

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panhandled every day, and I get a parking ticket at least once a week. Twenty bucks! You've got the bars and restaurants, but they don't overwhelm the area."

The parking meters that so bedevil Leigh downtown line Colorado Avenue as well, but there's a difference. They're at least two-hour meters, and free parking is readily available on side streets and in lots behind the buildings. Plus, there are no gaping parking lots in the heart of the shopping district.

Here's another whimsical touch: For whatever reason, there are no chain retailers in the historic core of Colorado City. No Starbucks, no McDonald's, no KFC. You have to leave the historic district and drive to 30th Street to satisfy your fast-food jones. Locally owned businesses dominate the avenue.

And in every building, history is alive and present.

"This space [in the 1891 Templeton Building] used to be a gentleman's club in 1895," says Teeters. "Here's a copy of the newspaper article about the club, which had gilded chandeliers, a bar, a dining room — all the amenities. Up on the third floor, the Knights of Pythias had their meeting hall — and look, here's a piece of club stationery we found in the basement."

Teeters turned the building's long history to commercial advantage a few months ago, hosting a well-attended event featuring investigators of the paranormal. Did they find any ghosts?

"Oh, it was so interesting..." she starts — but she never finishes, interrupted by customers.

A block to the west, we squeeze into local artist Laura Reilly's just-opened gallery. It's a tiny space, one that was originally a horse alley.

"I'd been thinking about just renting a place for a few days," she says, "but then I saw this space and I said, 'Yes — this is a gallery!'"

Time for a cupcake? Sorry, too late ... next door at Mya Bella's, there's a cheerful sign on the door: "All out of cupcakes — see you Tuesday!"

Final stop: All that Glitters, to look at that 21.7-carat aquamarine pendant. It's magnificent, and unaffordable. But maybe the local bank on the corner would make us a loan...

— hazlehurst@csindy.com

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