

Neighborhood Planning - A Pueblo History

INTRODUCTION

Overcoming the collapse of its economy and the dark days of damaged civic spirit, Pueblo has shown how a community can move to livability with hard work, creative amenity strategies and leadership.

Once Colorado's second largest city, a Rocky Mountain industrial powerhouse with smelters and steel mills owned by Rockefellers and Guggenheims and so many immigrant working families that the city boasted newspapers in 29 languages, Pueblo began a gradual economic decline after World War II and finally hit a financial wall in 1982. That was when Colorado Fuel & Iron, in its descent into bankruptcy, laid off 3,800 employees, beginning a local recession that lasted a decade. All construction stopped and, at its low point, residents were leaving in exponential numbers. The proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back" was a failed attempt to attract Anheuser-Busch brewery into town.

But Pueblo committed itself to rejuvenation. First came the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation, a non-profit partnership that combined the Pueblo Development Commission and the Private Industry Council. This alliance included most of the city's public and private leaders. The city settled in for a long-term, multi-faceted campaign that included education and training of employees in advance of employers' moving in, promotion and readying of industrial parks, construction of housing of different prices, and refurbishment of Pueblo's exceptional stock of Western Commercial Victorian-style buildings to lure shoppers and tourists downtown. With the single strategy of primary job recruitment, the diligence has paid off with an unemployment rate now in low-digit numbers.

Next, the encouragement and support of City Manager Lewis Quigley led the broader community in coming together to address downtown redevelopment. Following the production of two prize-winning plans - one dealing with economic and physical elements, the other with the "soul" of the community - residents set to work, looking to government only for assistance, not for control. Less than a decade later, the Union Street Historic District has been so successful that it has spurred the city to redirect part of the flow of the Arkansas River back through the heart of downtown in what is evolving into a landscaped, lined River Walk that commemorates Pueblo's history. Other key projects that have been implemented include the Pueblo Convention Center, the El Pueblo and Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center museums, the Buell Children's Museum, and the Sangre De Cristo Arts Center.

While Pueblo's trip back from economic collapse has not occurred overnight, the city's efforts are producing a dramatically more diverse and secure financial base plus a people-friendly downtown that celebrates Pueblo's heritage while attracting visitors and providing a center of activity - where business agreements are still finalized on the basis of a handshake.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

In the mid-1970's, the Pueblo community, in partnership with the CF&I Steel Mills, undertook a major environmental initiative. As a result, Pueblo now has the cleanest air of any major city on the Front Range region.

Pueblo is currently studying several Brownfields Reclamation Projects. The largest potential site is located on part of the Rocky Mountain Steel manufacturing site, still a functioning steel site.

To curb urban sprawl, the City of Pueblo and the Board of Water Works have acted conservatively in extending utilities. The limited availability of infrastructure has helped to also eliminate sprawl.

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

Pueblo residents benefit from a unique downtown park and restoration project - the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk of Pueblo. The site, now an idyllic downtown nexus for residents to meet, stroll, and play, was once hidden under surface parking, and channeled through concrete culverts.

In 1994, an ad-hoc citizens' group was formally recognized by the Pueblo City Council as the HARP Commission, and charged with conducting a feasibility study on bringing the river back to life. Pueblo citizens approved financing and design of a riverpark in 1995, sparking a four-year, two-phase project that today links the Central Business District with the Union Avenue Historic District.

In the third phase of the project, the Pueblo Natural Resources and Environmental Education Council will study habitat improvements, further river restoration, and the creation of a kayak course.

In the early 1970's, the City of Pueblo, along with government partners, began to acquire land along both the Fountain Creek and Arkansas River corridors. The effort has continued to this day. The City, with the assistance of Great Outdoors Colorado, has recently acquired open space on the Big Hill property, the highest point of land in the city. The Colorado State Parks Department, in cooperation with the City of Pueblo, plans to place 1,000 acres of land commonly referred to as the "Honor Farm" into permanent open space land.

ARTS & CULTURE

What drives public art in Pueblo is the community's artistic culture. Local citizen committees are formed to help assist in determining the public art focus. Artists are often selected to be a part of the project design team. Other times, as in the case of the State Highway 47 Noise Wall, the artist is chosen as the designer. This noise wall is commonly referred to as the largest public art project in Colorado.

A citizens group recently began a street gallery for regional artists entitled, "The Art and Soul of Pueblo Street Gallery." This nonprofit sculpture project promotes art as an important contributing element in arts education, cultural pride and community redevelopment. Located in the heart of Downtown Pueblo, the Street Gallery features works by Colorado artists.

Other local arts attractions include:

The El Pueblo Museum

The Colorado State Legislature recently funded a \$4 million expansion to the El Pueblo Museum. This will allow the museum to expand its scope by telling the history of southern and southeast Colorado from the early 1800's to present day.

The Southeastern Colorado Heritage Center

Five organizations who have joined together to establish this museum that presents exhibits, interpretations, and displays of Pueblo's natural and cultural heritage from pre-historic to modern times. The nonprofit Center is being developed as a public/private venture in the historic Denver & Rio Grande Western Freight Station in Central Pueblo.

The Colorado Outdoor Performing Arts Association (COPPA)

COPPA is building its new facility at the confluence of the Fountain Creek and Arkansas River.

DESIGN & PLANNING

The City and the County of Pueblo are currently in the process of preparing a joint Regional Comprehensive Development Plan. Its Guiding Principles for growth and development shape a plan that:

Maintains a strong and healthy urban core.

Recognizes the importance of Pueblo's downtown to the greater region.

Reduces the impact of development on the region's transportation system.

Provides a balance between developing new commercial/office/industrial sites and maintaining the viability of existing sites.

Promotes neighborhood preservation.

Promotes new neighborhood development plans that are reflective of Pueblo's older, traditional neighborhoods (mixed housing types and sizes, pedestrian friendly, accessible to parks and green space).

Encourages the integration of open space into the region's land use plan.



Plazas

One of the urban design concepts in the Pueblo downtown redevelopment effort, was the creation of interlocking plazas. In addition to providing residents with places to meet, eat lunch, and stroll, the plazas also host weddings and parties.

Public Buildings

Downtown Pueblo is a collage of exemplary public buildings. In the early 1990's, design professionals and citizens came together to identify a "Pueblo Vernacular" architectural style that reflected local environment and heritage. The results can be seen in the light-colored brick, the earth-red tones used in roofing materials, the integration of public art and the use of brick gates and arches. Public buildings such as the Joseph Edward Senior Center, the McClelland Library Building, and the Buell Children's Museum employed an artist on the design team.

SPECIAL PLACES: DOWNTOWN

Today, any day of the week people can enjoy bike trails, fishing, and rafting along the Arkansas River. Year round activities include the city's many museums, the zoo, and golfing.

The summer brings downtown street dances every weekend and outdoor festivals at the nature center. In the Fall, residents enjoy the Chili and frioles outdoor festival, Octoberfest, and historic reenactments at the Mercado. Winter is the time for the Historic Union Avenue Christmas Market, the Christmas Parade, the Weavers' Guild fair, and the Yule Log tradition at Pueblo's Mountain Park, as well as the holiday light festival at the Pueblo Zoo.

Recent downtown revitalization efforts include:

Business Improvement District

The Pueblo City Council has established a Business Improvement District that covers a large portion of the downtown area.

The Enterprise Zone

Awarded the Enterprise Zone status by the State of Colorado in 1986, the City of Pueblo and Pueblo County have used tax incentives to create 7,367 new jobs, and over \$577 million in new capital investments.

SPECIAL PLACES: NEIGHBORHOODS

Bessemer - This is a neighborhood that grew up around the steel mill, housing the immigrant population that settled in Pueblo to work at the mills. With residents from varying backgrounds, at one time it published twenty-three different foreign language newspapers. Today, it is home to a growing Hispanic population.

Downtown/Union Avenue - This historic heart of the Pueblo community is quickly developing into a vibrant downtown neighborhood. Many of the second and third floors of the Victorian commercial buildings have been converted into loft apartments. There are also three senior apartment buildings in or near the District. The Union Avenue District is defined by the Pueblo Union Depot on B Street, with its commercial spaces and outdoor dining, and on the north is anchored by the Historic Arkansas Riverwalk of Pueblo. In addition, several loft conversion projects are under development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: IMAGE, MARKETING & TOURISM

Following a local recession in the 1980's, community leaders forged the creation of the Pueblo Economic Development Corporation (PEDCo), a public private partnership. PEDCo focuses on job recruitment and industry diversification, helping to insure that the community would no longer rely solely on one single industry.

PEDCo is a public/private partnership that provides economic development for the entire region by promoting the Pueblo area to businesses and industries considering expansion or relocation. Pueblo actively seeks new growth and development in order to expand and diversify its economic base and create more jobs for its citizens. PedCo helps to achieve this by working closely with city, county and state elected officials. PedCo was created and is supported by more than 200 area businesses and individuals.

LEADERSHIP RECRUITMENT, TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The Greater Pueblo Chamber of Commerce has developed the Leadership for Tomorrow program providing an extensive training program for Pueblo's future leaders. Each year approximately 30 people graduate from this program.

COMMUNITY VISIONING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In 1995, the Pueblo community came together to create a document called, "The Soul of Pueblo" - a manifest defining the community as a place of warm hospitality and a rugged work ethic, heir to both, and ethnic and Victorian heritage, and shaped by ancient geologic forces.

The process was spearheaded by the Central Pueblo Place Committee. Building upon the framework of the "Soul of Pueblo," the committee is creating a format for the discussion of current and future projects that will respect and nurture the community's ideas and values and animate the soul of Pueblo.

2010 Commission

The 2010 Commission was developed in 1990 for the purpose of developing a strategic vision and plan for the community's future. This group raised the money for their effort from private community donations. This effort has been so successful that 10 years later, the commission has chosen to extend their work to 2020.

REGIONALISM

Pueblo is the regional hub for many services in the southern Colorado region, and serves as the headquarters for the Southern Colorado Community Foundation (SCCF), a nonprofit community foundation that serves greater southern Colorado. This area includes Pueblo, Canon City, Alamosa, Walsenburg, Trinidad, La Junta, and Lamar.

CREDITS:

This information is courtesy of:

Partners for Livable Communities

1429 21st Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel. 202/887-5990

Fax. 202/466-4845

<http://www.livableamerica.com/>

Partners for Livable Communities is a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development, and social equity. Since its founding in 1977, Partners has helped communities set a common vision for the future, discover and use new resources for community and economic development and build public/private coalitions to further their goals.