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PERSPECTIVES

Bruce Dierking: Perspective on NoBo



Developer Bruce Dierking had plans to transform The Armory (the former site of the Colorado Air National Guard Headquarters) into an arts pavilion with affordable artist housing and studio space. But they failed in 2015. This loss was felt deeply by the arts community in the area, and this episode in NoBo's history inspired the move to add arts and culture as a community benefit to the BVCP.

Dierking, who is currently building a mixed-use housing feature on the site of the proposed pavilion, agreed to share advice with the panel. His hope is that the neighborhood will continue to embrace its art focus. "I think the opportunity for placemaking is huge up there. It's a really wonderful neighborhood with a great sense of place. They want gathering spaces. The plaza vision we had--someone needs to do it--or a mini main street."

He notes that any successful plan in the future will likely stem from a partnership with the city: "It really comes down to what the city wants politically and what's feasible. With the level of very specific legislation around what you can do with a property, there's very little room to maneuver. Maybe that's the direction--coming up with a program that the city likes and where the city can be the leader."

Various advocacy groups in Boulder each want what is best for the city in their own way. But there are instances where attempts to solve one problem creates another. For instance, height ordinances have preserved the iconic mountainscape of Boulder, which is essential to the identity of the city. They also present unique challenges to pitching the roofs of buildings or adding other distinguishing features. Boulderites, therefore, have become increasingly unhappy with the “look” of new builds. “People hate how buildings look--so much of that is driven by the height limit.” Hopefully, solutions will emerge that allow developers to work within existing ordinances and to create more buildings that Boulderites love. Dierking wonders if using the number of stories as a height limitation, instead of feet, might solve some of the problems with the appearance of new builds in the future, but that is a question that will likely create debate.

He also notes that the many features that Boulder requires, from energy needs to upgraded materials, along with what he labels “a lengthy and inefficient review process,” get “baked into” the cost of new developments. While these features help Boulder live up to its values, they make it hard to create affordable properties. “From a market perspective, there’s a great market. The reality is that as the cost snowballs more and more and more...It drives the cost of everything up. It prices everyone out. Boulder risks becoming more of an elitist community.” This neighborhood offers an interesting experiment in which invested parties must get creative in order to bring their community values, such as affordability, environmental friendliness, and arts advocacy, into cohesion. Potential developers should be sensitive about these challenges.

There are many voices in the community on each of these issues, but Dierking’s case presents a fascinating Rubik’s cube for planners on the TAP. How can Boulder embrace its cherished values on the environment and height restrictions--and still make a place for the artists in NoBo who have helped give the city the creative flavor that is part of its very identity? It is the hope of the TAP sponsors that innovative solutions that can bring the community together will stem from this process. We believe that the arts can provide a path forward from a stalled conversation, and that the willingness of Dierking--and those who opposed his plans--to both participate in this process represents how much this district is loved by the community.



JIM LEACH:

NoBo Art District

A Local Developer's Thoughts on Future Opportunities

I have lived in North Boulder for the past 50 years and worked as a designer, builder, and developer of local planned residential developments and cohousing. I was a member of the North Boulder Steering Committee that in the late 1980s generated the Dover Koll plan for future North Boulder development, and that has driven the Holiday and Dakota Ridge neighborhood plans as well as the Uptown Broadway development.

Unfortunately, storage seems to still be the highest value use for the possible development sites in the area. I don't think there is yet a market for additional new commercial or industrial development that would better support the Arts District. I strongly feel that the established lite-industrial zoning on the west side of Broadway has over time generated some development, like storage businesses, that run counter to the needs or character of the art district and the neighborhoods.

The residential neighborhoods surrounding the art district are somewhat unique for Boulder in that they are denser and more diverse. In general, the residents support higher density and diversity as well as the character that the local art scene brings.

I feel that higher residential density is needed to better support the art district and associated commercial businesses, especially along the Broadway corridor.

My development perspective comes with a housing bias and experience. I feel that housing and mixed-use development, if done right, could be economically viable as a higher value land use than storage.

Boulder currently has a very high housing demand and pricing that can make creatively and appropriately designed smaller scale urban mixed-use developments successful. The art district can and should help drive the uniqueness and character of the North Boulder housing market.

I have listed below my take on sites in the art district as well as other significant existing structures, sites, and opportunities that have potential to support the character and success of the art district.

AO = Art Opportunity Site

Starting at Violet and Broadway and moving north to Yarmouth on the west side of Broadway:

1. The NW corner of Violet & Broadway – currently an old retail & industrial building with parking in front. A new mixed-use development approval has been in process on the site.
2. Shopping center containing Mandala restaurant & Reds Liquor and other small retail, with large open parking fronting along Broadway - AO.
3. Ponderosa mobile home park recently acquired by the city housing department that is located along the north side of the creek and bike/ped way and behind the above shopping area.
4. Shell gas station and car wash on north side of the creek.
5. Small attractive one-story commercial/office buildings with landscaped front and gravel parking where food truck works on weekends – AO.
6. Life Storage

Violet to Yarmouth on the east side of Broadway:

1. New two-story market rate apartment project owned and managed by Palmas.
2. Two Mile Creek with good café or other opportunity in the south end of the Uptown Broadway development and owned by Animal Arts, with great south-facing open space for patio area overlooking the creek and bike/ped path along the creek. - AO.
3. Future city-owned branch library site on north side of the creek where bike path crosses the creek and visible from Broadway - AO.
4. Uptown Broadway commercial development with two open courtyard spaces along Broadway that are marginally functional due to traffic impact and design. (Note, see the courtyard patios east of Protos and Spruce confections that are more functional.) - AO

From Yarmouth to Lee Hill Road on the west side of Broadway:

1. Native Landscape office and yards on large mostly open site.
2. Ace storage site with small art gallery office in a building and limited frontage on Broadway and weird shaped site to the west bordering open space – AO.
3. Large Namaste office and industrial building that is a possible future art center - AO.
4. New three-story residential building.
5. Life Storage second site
6. Secret Gardens artisan site with lite-industrial shops behind – AO.

Yarmouth to Lee Hill Road on the East Side:

1. Little branch public library on corner within new affordable rental apartments managed by Boulder Housing Partners (BHP).
2. U-Haul rental and storage site
3. Main Street North two-story mixed use at main entry to the Holiday Neighborhood. Proto's restaurant and Spruce bakery & Coffee anchor two sides of Yellow Pine Ave with attractive patio courtyards shielded by buildings but visible from Broadway.

Lee Hill Road to the north end of Broadway on the west side:

1. New two-story housing managed by BHP - AO
2. Boulder Homeless Shelter and north end Skip bus stop
3. Former Bustop adult entertainment location being approved for affordable housing above commercial that may be art focused - AO
4. Emerald City, large lite-industrial site fronted by Amazing Garage Sale and Wapos Mexican restaurant with large complex of workshops and studios behind. Site is in the county. - AO
5. New Dakota Ridge two and three-story upscale condominiums overlooking industrial county land to the south

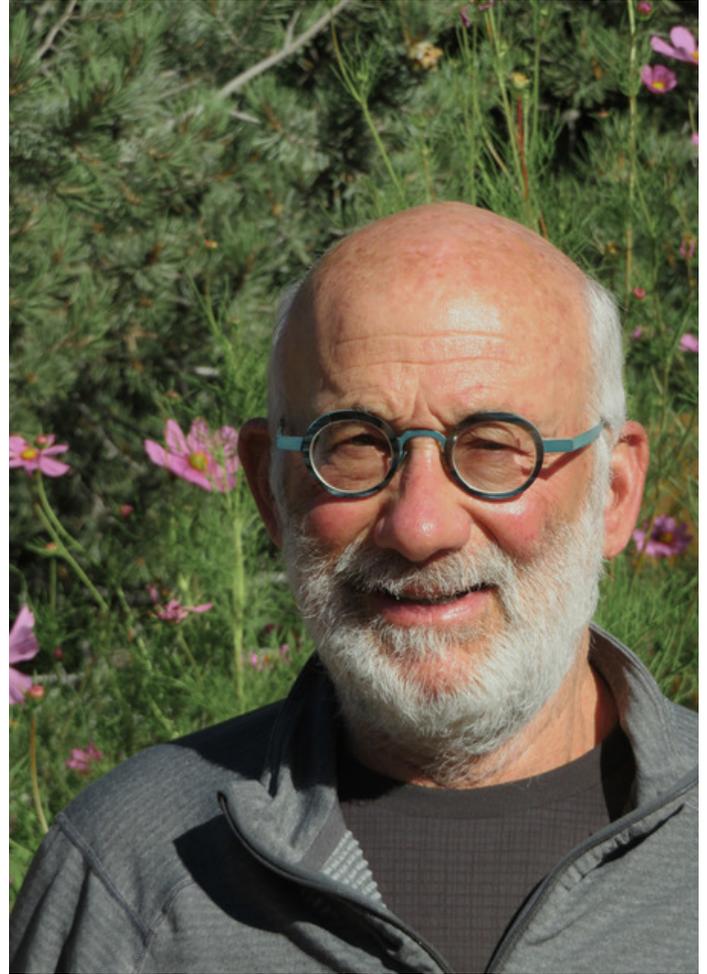
Lee Hill Road to the north end of Broadway on the east side:

1. BHP offices

Jerry Shapins: A Vision for Broadway

This contribution is from Jerry Shapins, an active artist and former landscape architect and urban designer/planner, and current member of the NoBo Art District Board of Directors. It is adapted from a letter to the City of Boulder, with observations on the proposed North Broadway (Violet to US 36) Reconstruction.

I have worked for the city on so many projects that include urban design and streetscape features, and I believe this project should also include these attributes because of the unique conditions of this corridor.



As a declared Art District, this section of road should contribute to the local creative character of place by including improvements that strengthen the pedestrian experience and reinforce the evolution of more vibrancy. My hope is for the budget and design in the first phase to be more flexible to perhaps include temporary features that can establish a safe, inviting, and attractive west-side pedestrian access system that humanizes this place. It should include large attractive pots and plant containers, an irrigation line, lighting, unique flowers, grasses, xeriscape features, and include features that reflects the evolving creative nature of NoBo. Perhaps potted plants can anchor artistic and graphic banners, poles, and identity features that do not have light poles to attach to. Distinct features that unify and improve the character of this complex section of roadway will strengthen the community's expectation of the future change that will come. When permanent curb cuts are installed later, these improvements can be recycled for the more permanent urban pattern. What would be also possible with this type of improvement is that NoBo could help the city to form a maintenance strategy that would enable a clean and attractive appearance.

This project represents a unique opportunity for all. While the stated purposes of the public investment are mostly "pavement," it seems that everyday life and particularly multimodal access should be strengthened with this work, particularly on the west side. This area is not safe for pedestrians; it's unattractive, confusing, and quite difficult for folks to find their way. While people currently make the best of these less-than-ideal conditions, it is important for the district to have a more complete system of sidewalks, lighting, art and reasonable pedestrian crossings. The benefits of a linked, safe and continuous walking environment on the west side will inspire a greater public life and vibrancy here, and encourage all the good placemaking benefits that Boulder speaks to. It will also strengthen the acceptance of local change that many fear and are skeptical about. Furthermore, if Boulder opens this process to a more diverse improvement benefit to include the west side, the spinoff beyond the standard engineering project will enlighten the hopes and dreams of all when the construction begins. People do want this, and no matter the schedule, budget or administrative constraints, a safe human-scale and pleasurable pedestrian experience will hopefully become a major part of this community project good for both the east and west sides.

No doubt we who are so thrilled that the NoBo Art District was recently officially recognized by the City of Boulder are also excited to see civic investment here that establishes the frame for a special place that is alive, beautiful, and sustainable. So completing the Violet to 36 project should result in short-term improvements that celebrate the public and artistic life and character along both sides of Broadway.

Andy Allison: Advice for the Panel

Developer Andy Allison is currently working on a project in the NoBo Art District. And he has plans underway at the nearby Diagonal Crossing site, which features innovative partnerships with artists and nonprofits. Allison offered his thoughts on ways that the TAP process can be useful to the art district in the future.

He believes that maintaining an awareness of Boulder-specific site concerns is an essential tool for success: “I think they should always frame their concepts so the first goal is trying to find a path that makes sense for the art district and also for the community and the policy and plans that are already in place.”

Allison believes that examples of model cities will be helpful guides for the district: “We need examples of areas like this and uses and planning strategies that [the panel] sees as coherent and beneficial to the art district.” He feels that codes for industrial zones in the area need to be revisited so that “the planning department could use that as a tool.” Allison suggests the possibility of creating an improvement district in the area (an idea that was included in the 2014 North Boulder Subcommunity Plan Update) might have a positive impact on the district if there were bonuses for artist space.

Art as a community benefit is new to the BVCP, and Allison thinks it could offer inspiration to the panelists. “Maybe focus a planning idea around art as a community benefit. What sort of incentives have other cities used to encourage this?” He also says that future developers in the area need to work with tenants to support the arts.

For Allison, success for the TAP revolves around the North Boulder Subcommunity Plan. “Understand that document. For North Boulder, knowing what stakeholders were after when they wrote the plan is important.” The document itself and the road to success for any proposed development comes down to the city’s process for approval. “The panel has to be able to frame that they understand the environment and planning process of Boulder.”

Allison also has advice for any developers who want to incorporate the arts into their work: “Partner with tenants who are going to make your development successful. To ignore them and just look solely at the bottom line is silly.”

