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ULC Commits to Gardens at the Holly

By Joan Wallach

One year ago arson burned down much of the Holly Shopping Center. On May 20 a press conference was held acknowledging the tough history of this location and the recent purchase of the property by the nonprofit Urban Land Conservancy (ULC).

Mayor John Hickenlooper and Councilwoman Carla Madison added their voices to the chorus of hope and celebration for the re-emergence of what's known as the Holly, the once vibrant shopping area including much of the property between 33rd and 35th Avenues and Hudson and Holly Streets.

While development will take place on a longer timeline than a healthier economy would allow, Aaron Miripol, President and CEO of the Urban Land Conservancy, is committed to working with neighbors, neighboring nonprofits and city agencies to develop the area. News of a charter school locating at the site should be known in six to nine months.

Additionally, Miripol said, "ULC is committed in the long term to having some type of agricultural activity on this site as a complement to the redevelopment efforts. We would like to see positive activity on the property now, and Feed Denver is helping make that happen."

A Different Kind of Groundbreaking

A Garden Raising took place at the Holly Center on Sunday, May 17. Feed Denver: Urban Farms & Markets began their first urban garden plot in front of Sanchez Taqueria across from the Hiawatha Davis Rec. Center. The project will be both a demonstration garden/farm for the neighborhood and provide fresh foods for neighbors, neighboring restaurants and food banks.

Feed Denver: Urban Farms & Markets' mission is "dedicated to strengthening and securing Denver's food systems and helping transform our neighborhoods into green, sustainable, and productive communities through building a thriving, urban agricultural industry." Lisa Rogers is the founder of Feed Denver. Feed Denver is part of an exciting international movement to bring farming back to backyard gardens and neighborhood community gardens. This is part of a larger movement to minimize costly and wasteful transportation of produce and the chemicals used to grow it.

Lisa Roger's vision is in part inspired by the work of Will Allen, founder of Growing Power in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Allen is the recipient of a 2008 MacArthur Fellowship for his work in "transforming the cultivation, production, and delivery of healthy foods to underserved, urban populations." Allen's non-profit organization is called Growing Power. Readers can find more about it at www.growingpower.org. Talks between Rogers and Allen are assisting Feed Denver in creating a strong and viable program.

Rogers tells us, “Food, plants, and soil will be made available to the community through sales at a market stand and donations to area food banks and organizations. We plan to work with neighboring organizations to involve them in the use of the farm.”

Ms. Mable Banks, a local master gardener, will assist Rogers in increasing the viability of the project by bringing in neighbors to advise and assist in the gardens. There are plans to have an advisory board of both elders and youth and to have paid caretakers of the garden plots and demonstration sites.

The Plot Thickens

Kenzie Davison and Adam Brock are young people who worked hard at the Holly Center in the morning sun to begin building raised beds that people using wheelchairs would find accessible. Davison and Brock are members of Transition Denver, a group whose website reads “working together to create a resilient, sustainable, and vibrant community.” Transition Denver is part of Transition Colorado and a worldwide movement which can be found at http://transitionculture.org.

Plants donated by Kip Nash of a Boulder Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, including corn, beans, squash, broccoli, and kale will grow alongside tomatoes and flowers including nasturtium and marigolds that assist in pest control for the vegetables. The project will cultivate plots to demonstrate the use of compost techniques for growing soil as well as permaculture techniques for growing fruits and vegetables.

Feed Denver is also partnering with the Urban Farm at Stapleton. They hope to create a Regional Training Center to teach the basic skills and techniques needed to grow food in the city. Other partners include Denver Public Health, Denver Environmental Health, Denver Urban Gardens, and Denver Public Schools.

The web site for Feed Denver is www.feeddenver.org. If you would like to get involved as a farmer or supporter of Feed Denver’s work to create a viable farm at the Holly please contact info@feeddenver.com or call 303-513-7548.