

# Community Investment Impact on West Denver Neighborhoods

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## Introduction

This report was initiated to better understand neighborhoods Urban Land Conservancy (ULC) is working in Denver's West Rail Corridor. ULC has five community investments within the Corridor; 1. Social Enterprise Foundry in Sun Valley, 2. Mile High Vista; in West Colfax, and 3. 11th Ave TOD; in West Colfax, 4. Sheridan Station, and 5. Jody Apartments in Villa Park separated from West Colfax by Lakewood Gulch and the new West Line. The West Line Light Rail, part of the region's FasTracks development, was completed along the Lakewood Gulch in the spring of 2013. The West Line connects Golden, Lakewood and Denver and has four light rail stations along Lakewood Gulch. Going west, the Sun Valley light rail station is located at Decatur and Federal. Two light rail stations Knox Ct. and Perry St. stations are shared by the West Colfax and Villa Park neighborhoods. Finally, Sheridan station is shared by Villa Park and the City of Lakewood. Current Development within West Corridor includes the St. Anthony's redevelopment project comprised of 20 acres along 17<sup>th</sup> Ave connecting the south side of Sloan's Lake and the north side of West Colfax. The Decatur and Federal station of Sun Valley is seen as a precursor to the imminent large scale redevelopment many have planned for the community's future.

The West Line Light Rail has had a significant impact on corridor wide collaboration efforts. The West Line Corridor Collaborative (WLCC), for example, was a non-profit organization through the collaboration of public agencies, such as housing authorities, transit organizations, and municipalities among the cities of Denver, Lakewood, Golden and parts of Jefferson County. Each city has Light Rail stations along the West line. The WLCC contributed to investment efforts and supported livable communities, emphasizing the 20 minute neighborhood in their advocacy efforts. In the beginning stages of corridor wide development, the WLCC partnered with the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD) to create a strategy for implementing successful and sustainable, transit-oriented development (TOD) along the Corridor. This Collaborative was the first of its kind nationally and RTD attempted to replicate it for each of its' developing rail lines in Denver.

The city of Denver has also pursued collaborative efforts in the development of West Line Rail corridor with the Denver Livability Partnership (DLP). DLP was a collaborative partnership created in 2011, to apply for the HUD Community Challenge Grant and a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. After receiving the \$2.9 M grant, DLP fostered partnerships and opportunities along the West Line Rail corridor, with a focus on livable, transit- oriented neighborhoods with multi modal connections.

For the scope of this study, interviews with stakeholders were conducted throughout the summer of 2015. The interviews consisted of six base questions: three open ended and three that asked the respondents to answer the

questions with a rating on a 1-5 scale<sup>1</sup>, leaving space for them to give a reason why, if they so choose. Most initial respondents were selected based on a list of stakeholders provided at the beginning of the study. These stakeholders were involved in Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs), non -profits, and community organizations within the West Colfax Corridor. Initial emails were sent to each individual inviting them to participate in being interviewed. Those who responded were interviewed in person or via phone. In most cases, respondents were also gracious enough to provide contact information for additional individuals whom added insights and perspectives on their neighborhood, creating a snowball effect. When writing up interviews any information that could compromise the individual's anonymity was not included. Information not included in the interviews may be used in the observations sections of the report.<sup>2</sup>

Participant observation was also a method used in this study. Neighborhood meetings around issues of food access and food deserts in West Colfax and the planning of the Re- Imagine West Colfax event were attended throughout the duration of the study. Two Denver Days community festivals, in West Colfax and Sun Valley, along with the Re- Imagine West Colfax Event were also observed. Observation was also conducted in a meeting with Imagining Possibilities; the program exposes youth to conversations and trades concerning the built environment. Villa Park was not as readily available for opportunities of observation.

The report will provide neighborhood specific and corridor wide observations concerning redevelopment, neighborhood dynamics and concepts of space. It is worth mentioning that observations gathered as a result of the interviews and participant observation are general insights from the authors point of view and do not reflect specific individuals' opinions or stances. All data used was found on the Piton Foundation's Community Facts website.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The rating system ranged from 1- lowest level of satisfaction or involvement to 5- the highest level of satisfaction or involvement.

<sup>2</sup>All interviews are included in the appendix of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Piton Foundation Community Facts: <http://denvermetrodata.org>

# Sun Valley

Sun Valley is a neighborhood all of its own. When looking on the map it's easy to see how Sun Valley could be considered a community within the West Colfax corridor. However, when experiencing Sun Valley, it is the complete opposite. The neighborhood is defined by Federal Blvd on the west, the Platte River to the east and Mile High Stadium to the north and the DHA Sun Valley Homes to the south. From the outside, people would say that the residents are trapped in Sun Valley with such physical "concrete" borders, but most who live there say it keeps a person out, which means there is a community within. You usually don't end up in Sun Valley unless you meant to be there, or you are lost.

Sun Valley is the poorest neighborhood in Colorado; this is in large part due to the concentrated poverty with DHA's Sun Valley Homes. Over 90% of the residents within the Sun Valley Neighborhood live in the DHA Homes. Sun Valley is also an extremely diverse area, with members of their community being from the U.S., Mexico, Latin and Central America, along with countries in Africa. As of 2013, Sun Valley was 48% Latino with the second largest population being 23% African American. Only 3% of the homes in Sun Valley are owner occupied, there was also no housing vacancy. There were a total of 2,399 jobs in Sun Valley, with 23% unemployment. Of the 83% of persons and the 77 % of families in poverty in Sun Valley; 80% of Latinos, 94% of African- Americans, 100% of Native Americans, and 66% of Non-Latino Whites, fall into that category.

Within the past 15 years there have been numerous planning and development conversations concerning Sun Valley. With Mile High Stadium and Mile High Station, just north of the neighborhood, the area is looked upon as a site of economic development for the City. In many cases this is also seen as a "much needed" development of Sun Valley. The Decatur- Federal General Redevelopment Plan of 2014 is one of the most recent plans developed to address the inevitable change in Sun Valley. The issue is no one I interviewed knows when it will actually be implemented.

## Assets

The following organizations and entities listed are assets in the community, meaning they provide services or benefits to the Sun Valley Neighborhood.

- Castro Center and Denver Health- Located at 1200 Federal Blvd. in the same buildings the Department of Human services and Denver Health. They are the two largest employers in the Sun Valley neighborhood. These entities also provide services for those living in the Sun Valley Neighborhood.
- Rude Recreation Center- at 2855 Holden Pl. was Re modeled in the past 15 years. This recreation center is a space for youth and residents in the community to participate in youth and sports, MyDenver programming, swimming and other programming and resources the recreation center has to offer.
- Earth Links- provides a work program for people who are homeless and low-income to learn skills and create Earth-friendly products that sustain the people and the planet.
- Sun Valley Youth Center- at 1230 Decatur St. focuses on transforming the lives of at-risk youth in this low-income, public housing neighborhood, Sun Valley Youth Center provides: day care, after-school care, youth development, and mentoring and life essentials programs to help raise up the neighborhood's youth.
- Fresh Start- located at 2175 Holden Place, is a non-profit focused on family and community connections.

- Imagining the Possibilities- a youth program sponsored by RADIANT, focusing on how youth interact with the built environment while also educating them about fields such as architecture, urban planning and development in hopes that they spark interest in fields they could possibly pursue in the future.
- Social Enterprise Foundry- located at 953 Decatur St. Is ULC owned, and houses five non-profits that serve various needs and communities in the Sun Valley Neighborhood. They focus on triple bottom line non-profits that can train, employ and empower individuals in the surrounding community.
- Ink Monstr – located at 2712 Holden Place, is a graphic design and printing company that has made a home for itself in Sun Valley, they have committed to being a part of the community and not just a business with property there. They employ youth in the area for internships, which can turn into paid positions.
- Sun Valley Community Kitchen- located at 1260 Decatur St., they offer their commercial kitchen and space to other organizations in the community to prepare meals for youth or for meeting space for programming.
- Denver Housing Authority- DHA has built 324 apartments in the Sun Valley Homes community and provides services for those who reside in the development. They also work with other organizations in the Sun Valley community and serve as a resource.
- City Year- a national education-focused organization founded in 1988 dedicated to helping students and schools succeed. Teams of City Year AmeriCorps members provide high-impact student, classroom and school-wide support, to help students stay in school and on track to graduate from high school, ready for college and career success. City Year members stationed in Sun Valley serve Fairview Elementary school.

The closing of Mi Pueblo grocery store, just west of Sun Valley, next to Mile High Vista, was seen as a lost asset, however through conversation, it was said that most residents of Sun Valley considered the store a world away, due to its location across Federal Blvd. There was also the mention of the store not serving the immigrant populations from non-Latino countries within Sun Valley Homes, since they would not think to go there for ingredients for their native cuisines.

## **Community Groups**

The Sun Valley Community Coalition (SVCC) is the registered neighborhood organization recognized by the city. It is relatively new; it was revamped around one and a half years ago. Membership is mostly comprised of property owners and organizations, and a couple of residents, reaching about 20-30 individuals. SVCC did not meet during my summer internship.

To my knowledge, DHA planning meetings were not taking place during my internship. However many respondents either sat on the DHA board, or served on the DHA planning committee, which has been a large center of community engagement within Sun Valley. Recent events may have a negative effect on this space in the future; regarding the dynamics betters developers, residents and the development process in the area.

I did learn of the Local Residents Council, governed by the Sun Valley Homes Residents. The respondent who lived in the Sun Valley Homes had no idea the group existed. In an effort to observe the meetings, I looked for a schedule, but it was not readily available online.

## Community and Events

The Sun Valley Block Party Sponsored by Ink Monstr, in August 2015, was well attended. People from all different generations attended the block party. Volunteers were from Ink Monstr, and also youth from the Sun Valley Youth center. Also many City Year members working at Fairview elementary, in attendance I believe they were helping to register individuals for free school supplies. There was a diverse group of people at the event, however, the patrons were predominantly people of color, where the volunteers, were mostly white males in their early to late 20's.

In observing the youth program in Sun Valley, the youth are within the range of 8-15 years of age. I went to speak on how the built environment affects me. During my presentation many of the youth were disengaged. It seemed as though they didn't want to think about anything that was out of their control. They were much more concerned with building a bench and specifics of that, rather than thinking about how architecture, planning and development affect their everyday lives. Though the conversation was meant to be a conceptual discussion, it was their reality, with the talk of redevelopment in the air. There was an overall sense of discouragement and apathy. They mentioned the tearing down of 7-11 and Family Dollar along Federal. Most youth said that both places were where most families get all of their groceries and everyday needs. They felt that they had no power in the direction of development.

*“They don't care about anything we have to say or how this affects us,  
we're supposed to grow up and move out anyway”*

Overall it seems as though the pending redevelopment of the area, is creating stronger ties among community organizations, but has created a cloud of uncertainty of their future hanging over many residents.

## Ownership and Property

Many of the interviews conducted in Sun Valley were centered on ownership and property. With the reality of development hanging over head there are very specific tensions in the air, especially among those who are active in community groups but also own property. There is a very small non DHA resident population in Sun Valley. According to a respondent ownership of residences is scarce. Along 12th, there are two owner occupied houses, the rest are occupied rentals. Along 13<sup>th</sup>, four houses, possibly only three, are owned by people living in the community, the rest are rented out. Lastly, along Holden Place, there is one rental. Contrary to both Villa Park and West Colfax, the small population of homeownership creates a unique dynamic in Sun Valley's relationship to redevelopment.

For a few property owners that are also non-profits, for example EarthLinks and ULC, the issue of ownership affects their business and mission. There is an overall worry that redevelopment will have a negative impact on those organizations that provide services to residents in the community. In the case of EarthLinks, if the property around their land is purchased and construction surpass a certain story height, their entire property will be useless and they will no longer be able to provide the services and programming foundational to their organization.

## **Redevelopment**

In conversation concerning Sun Valley residents, there was an overwhelming sentiment that residents were checked out of the redevelopment process. Also individuals interviewed, who were working with adult residents in the community were not forthcoming with any information, or people I should talk to for more information. They were very protective of their relationships with these individuals, which suggest that they worked very hard to forge those bonds. From my perspective this behavior suggests of a pattern of distrust fostered by the immutable climate of redevelopment present in Sun Valley.

The implementation of the West Line, though seen as an improvement for the area, has not been heavily used by Sun Valley Residents. In most people's opinions the Light Rail is inaccessible for many of the Sun Valley Residents because of the price point, it is simply too expensive.

Residents within the area are concerned about being displaced and Sun Valley being yet another site of gentrification within Denver. However with the large concentration of low income residents, gentrification could have a severe impact as there is likely nowhere, in Denver, Sun Valley Homes residents can go. In discussions of the redevelopment of Sun Valley there have been positive and negative points of conversation surrounding the area. Some respondents raved about DHA's efforts of residents' engagement throughout the conversation of redevelopment, especially during the process coinciding with a HUD planning grant. More recently, I met with a respondent who was infuriated that a secret, or last minute, development meeting was held on the same day as a community event. The meeting prevented many of the events "heavy hitters" from being able to attend the community event. When community members attempted to attend the development meeting, they were physically forced out of the meeting. As a result some of the Sun Valley residents in attendance were disgusted, disheartened and have become distrusting of the entire redevelopment process.

## **Constructs of Space**

Sun Valley is a very isolated community both in a physical and social context. When speaking of the other two neighborhoods involved in the study, they were referred to as "a world away." Most of the respondents that used this language were property owners and not necessarily residents of the Sun Valley area, but it seemed like a general sentiment. The area has a very large child population, so most of the spaces and assets in the community serve a specific 4-16 population. The future development of the area seems to be driven by the proximity of Mile High Stadium to the Sun Valley Neighborhood. Many respondents say that redevelopment of the Sun Valley area needs to happen, but are unsure what that redevelopment will look like. With redevelopment, there will be efforts to connect Sun Valley to the rest of Denver, but that also means that the current trends happening in the Denver Metro area can flood into Sun Valley and possibly wash out the community created by such isolation, in efforts to replace it with connectivity.

# West Colfax

With the 2002 Blueprint Denver plan, West Colfax's designation as an "Area of Change", it was predicted that West Colfax would be a neighborhood to watch in the coming years. Now in 2015, what was once known as one of the most affordable communities in Denver is now becoming out of reach and unaffordable for working families. In the last decade, homes that were worth \$95,000 were selling for double, and sometimes three times as much. In the past three years, West Colfax has seen an increase in development, for example the addition of the West Line Light Rail, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless's Renaissance Flats, and the transit oriented development Mile High Vista, including the Avondale Apartments. By far the biggest change in West Colfax is the departure of St. Anthony's hospital in 2012, taking over 1,000 jobs to its new campus at the Federal Center along the West Line in Lakewood. The land was purchased by EnviroFinance Group in 2013, bringing much needed development, but also new challenges for what is seen as the inevitable future of West Colfax.

As of 2013, West Colfax was 55% Latino, and 35% Non-White Latino being the second highest population. However, 63% of homeowners were Non- Latino White where as 34% of them is Latino. There were no African-American Homeowners. There were 1,445 jobs in the West Colfax neighborhood and 12% unemployment. Of the 37% of Persons and 31% Families in poverty, 42% of Latinos, 68% of African- Americans, 79% of Native Americans and 21% of Non- Latino Whites in the neighborhood fall into that category<sup>4</sup>.

Respondent interviews used for this sections observation are comprised of a balance between residents and stake holders.

## Assets

- The West Colfax Business Improvement District- at 4500 W Colfax - has executed various project within the West Colfax Corridor, including way finding signage, implementing visually appealing bus shelters, and working with various organizations to create a more walkable and pedestrian friendly West Colfax. Multiple respondents had nothing but great things to say about the BID and its Director.
- Confluence Ministries - at 1400 Quitman St, is a space that many organizations in the community or hoping to engage with community hold their meetings. It is a space for bringing people together and is not necessarily completely faith based. WeCAN holds their meetings there.
- Girls Inc.- On Colfax, just a couple of blocks west of Corky Gonzales Library, is an organization founded to inspire all girls to be empowered girls and worked toward an equitable society. Was encouraged to speak to the organization, by multiple respondents in West Colfax. Reached out to organization several times over the summer, but they didn't return phone calls or emails.
- The Arthur E. Johnson Boys and Girls Club- located at West 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, behind Cheltenham Elementary, they serve the West Colfax neighborhood, but operate within a silo within its work with the kids in the neighborhood. No collaboration with Girls Inc., but they didn't give an exact reason why, just said they don't really work together.

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<sup>4</sup> Piton Foundation Community Facts: <http://denvermetrodata.org>

- Corky Gonzales Library – Located at the corner of Colfax and Irving along with ULC’s Mile High Vista, is a new library built to provide much needed library services in the area. The building was designed with the purpose of celebrating the diverse and culturally rich community that is West Colfax. Many residents across the three neighborhoods patron the library and feel it is a great community asset.

## **Community and Events**

The West Colfax Neighborhood Festival took place Saturday, August 8th, in Paco Sanchez Park. Part of the Denver Days Initiative set forth by Mayor Hancock. The event had over 30 tents with vendors, community groups and local businesses, free food, and live entertainment all day. There was a kids zone, with a bouncing castle, bubble suits, and a local salon/barber offering free haircuts. It seemed as if everyone from the neighborhood came to the festival.

The Re-imagine West Colfax event took place Sunday (they chose Sunday in an effort to get the Jewish Orthodox community to the event, which they did get), August 16th, on Colfax between the intersection of Tennyson and Utica. Held to create a space to find possible solutions to making Colfax more walkable and bikeable, the event included several types of bike lanes that allowed riders to test different bike lane solutions. It also had pedestrian bulb outs to decrease the crossing distance on Colfax. Participants also experienced enhanced crosswalks, median refuges, large scale art, kids activities, wider sidewalks and small pop-up parks along Colfax. There were also food trucks, music, art, and free ice cream and beer.

In attending both West Colfax Neighborhood Festival sponsored by Confluence Ministries and the West Colfax BID Re- Imagine West Colfax event, there was a dramatic difference in attendance. The Re-Imagine event pulled a much smaller, fairly homogenous crowd of middle aged white residents and their families, compared to that of the West Colfax Neighborhood Festival that pulled a much more diverse crowd, both in terms of age and ethnicity. This could possibly be due to the very short two month timeline the Re- Imagine West Colfax event was working within.

The difference in attendance could also be due to the different roles the two organizations play in the community. The West Colfax Neighborhood Festival offered free food such as hot dogs and popcorn, while the BID offered free beer, doughnuts and ice cream. This could have also influenced residents’ decisions to attend. It is also possible that the events were tailored towards to different audiences although both were put on in an effort to engage the community. Confluence Ministries most likely has more social ties within the community than the West Colfax BID. In some residents’ eyes, Confluence Ministries’ presence could simply be seen change toward a more connected community. There is likely less skepticism about the goals of the organization, since they exist to create “confluence” within the community. However, the BID’s role as a business improvement district could influence how residents interpret their efforts and community events. It is very likely residents could consider the BID to be motivated by creating business and economic development, which in many residents minds is closely tied to gentrification, rather than community improvement. Although the BID does an impressive job engaging with the community, it is harder for them to address community improvement efforts without resident’s impressions or pre conceived notions of a BID.

## Resident Groups

In interviewing residents, four groupings of residents naturally presented themselves through conversation. Many of the respondents fell into the 10-15 year category. There is a natural succession from those who have lived, 5, 10, 15 and more than 25 years in the community in relation to how they see the community changing in the future. Those who belong within the 5 year category were referred to as individuals just looking for a house in Denver and couldn't afford to live in the Highlands or Stapleton therefore not necessarily caring for the culture of the neighborhood, but its proximity to downtown Denver. The individuals in the 10 and 15 year categories have a sense of the history of the neighborhood and moved there both for the affordability and the culture. The 25 year category appeared in conversations of residents interviewed, with a sense of concern. Conversations surrounding this group revealed a glimpse of the community and neighborliness the respondents spoke about. It seemed as though they were, in a way trying to preserve it, even if they meant recalling instances where they remember helping those 25+ years residents move out of the neighborhood.<sup>5</sup>

Overall from the information gathered, there is a separation in understandings or realities of the West Colfax neighborhood among its residents. This difference is based in generational differences and differences in income. Many residents simply fear there is no way to bridge the gap. This gap includes anything from ideas of neighborhood aesthetics and what it means to be a neighbor, to wants and perceived needs in order for the neighborhood to progress.

In online conversations and chatrooms around the topic of development in their neighborhood, most residents use the Highlands or Jefferson Park as points of reference. Depending on the resident group, they either want to be more like or avoid becoming these neighborhoods. There are discussions of wanting more amenities and making West Colfax into a destination for Denver-ites. At times there were instances of non-intentional classist and at times racist coded language towards populations within West Colfax. Some individuals on the message board cited the trend toward a Highlands like neighborhood as their reason for moving out of the West Colfax neighborhood.

Lastly, there are “*Us vs. Them*” mentalities forming within the resident groups. The West Colfax Association of Neighbors (WeCAN) is the city recognized registered neighborhood organization, however it was mentioned that two other groups within the neighborhood exist that serve the same function, but are not recognized by the city. This could be a result of splintering due to WeCAN’s endorsement of the St. Anthony’s redevelopment. In the meetings attended throughout the study, WeCAN membership was comprised of mostly white individuals over the age of 45, and young, 30 or so, white residents who had recently moved in. It was interesting to see the lack of diversity among the RNO constituents. In many conversations, those I interviewed say they appreciated the diversity of the communities that have been historically represented in the neighborhood, i.e. Jewish, Hispanic/Latino/Chicano and intentionally considered that when making the decision to move into the neighborhood.

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<sup>5</sup> A more detailed breakdown of the resident groups is included in the Appendix.

# Redevelopment

Most of the respondents have a negative connotation with development or redevelopment due to the increase in the cost of housing, and the volume of scrape and build duplexes that are “popping up” throughout the neighborhood. Many residents say they have had developers knocking on their doors asking them what their plans are for their house, or if they would be willing to sell. Residents interviewed also believe the duplexes are of poor build quality. Many are sad to see the craftsman/brick homes being destroyed. There is the sentiment that the duplexes are ruining the neighborhood aesthetic, and the trend of high-density is slowly eating away at the neighborhood culture.

Through hearsay and mention within various interviews, the overall disagreements among residents regarding conversations of redevelopment in West Colfax are the “too much affordable housing” and “too many service organizations” concerns. In either case it seems as though the arguments against are rooted in thoughts of stunting economic development and a general phobia of “the poor.”

In relation to the St. Anthony’s redevelopment, specifically a representative from the developer EFG, whose name was not disclosed, has a friendly relationship with the leadership within WeCAN. When asked what they knew about the St. Anthony’s Development, most respondents knowledge centered on the development being “high end”, with little to no affordable housing. Out of the seventeen interviews only three individuals were familiar with the 2006 St. Anthony’s Task Force Recommendations<sup>6</sup>. These recommendations concern areas of redevelopment, urban form, mix of uses, access and connectivity, sustainability and the development process of the property left behind by St. Anthony’s. In the report the task force communicates the hope that the area remains an anchor for the entire community, with a continued commitment to the health and wellness context of its previous occupant. Guiding principles and priority considerations throughout the document place a large emphasis on community space, accessible health care, cultural preservation, economic diversity, pedestrian friendly modes of commuting, walkability, bike-ability and transparency and engagement with the community throughout the development process.

Some knew the document existed but were unaware of specifics, others had no idea it existed. Of those who discussed it, they said that the recession played a large part in the document being forgotten, and the community not holding the developer to the recommendations set forth in the report.

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<sup>6</sup> A document created and published as a result of the Task force convened by the Mayor’s office, to create community feedback and investment in the neighborhoods future, after the departure of St. Anthony’s Hospital.

## Constructs of Space

In many cases West Colfax respondents situated themselves between 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>; with Colfax divided between North and South. With this construction of space comes a unique north and south conception of space relative to Colfax. For example, north Colfax represents affluence. Those within the specific West Colfax borders use Sloan's lake and also Highlands as examples of affluence. In south West Colfax they used St. Anthony's and the scrape and builds as examples of affluence. In both cases the respondents were fearful of when "it," the development culture or values they feel are attached to affluence, would "jump" the lake, or "jump" Colfax and what would happen to their neighborhood once "it" hit.

Communities created by certain cultures and traditions were mentioned in efforts to emphasize diversity of the neighborhood, but it seemed as though these communities do not follow the same patterns of residency and use as the more mainstream demographics of the neighborhood. For example, Jewish Orthodox community exists on both the north and south side of the Colfax, with the Girls Yeshiva south of Colfax and the Boys Yeshiva and Temple north of Colfax.

There was no mention of the services and shelters that are along West Colfax from resident respondents other than the large amounts of senior housing.

# Villa Park

Situated between Lakewood Gulch to the north and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave to the south and Federal to the east and Sheridan to the West, Villa Park was the most difficult area for me to get engaged in. The Villa Park Neighborhood Association (VPNA) uses space at their local elementary school, Eagleton Elementary to meet which, with the school closed during the summer means they do not meet.. This could be a factor that contributed to hindering my ability to gather information about the neighborhood. In addition to speaking with people who worked within the neighborhood, there was a total of four interviews conducted centering Villa Park.

As of 2013, Villa Park neighborhood was predominantly Latino at 76%, with 64% of the owned homes being owned by Latinos. There are only 143 jobs in the Villa Park neighborhood with 10% unemployment. Within the 31% persons and 24% of Families in poverty, 34% of the Latinos in the area are in poverty, followed by 51% of African Americans, and 55% of Native Americans and 22% of Non-Latino Whites<sup>7</sup>.

## Assets

The West Line Light Rail and its 3 stops in Villa Park is the biggest asset in the community as of right now. It has become a way to connect West Colfax and created ways for individuals to experience the community.

## Community Groups

In those interviews I found that there was a lack of response and engagement to my emails. The individual who is involved in running their social media (Facebook and Twitter) accounts, is not heavily involved in the Villa Park Neighborhood Association .With this I can only assume that the actual inner workings and conversations happening within the VPNA are not made available to the public via Facebook. Information is mostly disseminated by word of mouth much more than through the internet. Facebook is more for relevant conversations such as updates for the sustainable neighborhoods initiative, events in the surrounding area, reminders about VPNA meetings, and linking conversations on Next Door etc.

The VPNA does have some communication with WeCAN and got most of their information about the St. Anthony's development through conversations with, or information handed out by WeCAN. One thing for sure is that they are anti density when it comes to development. There is a Not in my Backyard Mentality around TOD. Though the Light Rail is nearby they don't like the high density development that is going in or has been planned. Similar to West Colfax it is a conversation of aesthetics.

In terms of property and change in residents, there has been some trickle down from West Colfax as far as an increase in purchases of houses, which has slightly modified the demographics of the population but not to the point that anyone is worried.

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<sup>7</sup> Piton Foundation Community Facts: <http://denvermetrodata.org>

## **Redevelopment**

With the re-zoning of the St. Anthony's development some residents are weary that the development will set precedent for future developments in the Villa Park area. From those interviewed re-zoning is the biggest concern in the Villa Park neighborhood. With the FasTracks West Line rail development there are concerns that high density housing development will follow. This transit oriented style of development has in some cases been perceived as a possible disruption of the overall aesthetic of the neighborhood. In fact, Villa Park went as far as to get many properties along the rail line downzoned in order to prevent higher density properties from being built. There seem to be no other recent redevelopment efforts that are a cause of concern. With the lack of retail and amenities in the area, no one interviewed was concerned that development of the same magnitude of West Colfax will happen in their area. Villa Park went through its own redevelopment in the late 90's, before the sudden boom of transplants and families seeking affordable homes. However, Villa Park is a community of homeowners, to the point where homeownership is what keeps the fabric of the neighborhood. The few houses that are bought and flipped are, for some residents, perceived as individuals slowly chipping away at the fabric of the neighborhood.

## **Constructs of Space**

Villa Park, similar to Sun Valley has a physical barrier of a hill, and the Lakewood gulch and another Gulch coming from the southwest which affect how people experience and move within the community. Most will not travel the hill if they do not have to. Others especially those in the senior citizen category say that it is a barrier that prevents them from using the newly built West Line Light rail stations at Perry and Knox, due to the incline.

With Lakewood Gulch separating the West Colfax and Villa Park neighborhoods there is a clear sense of the separation of what is what, and what area concerns whom. Between the single family homes aesthetic of the overall Villa Park neighborhood and the physical gulch there is a definitive boundary of the Villa Park neighborhood for those who live within it and look upon it.

# Overall Observations

Over the course of the internship it became clear that for those interviewed, the St. Anthony's redevelopment is a prominent project along the West corridor. However, redevelopment as a concept affected the area in ways that cannot be tied to just St. Anthony's, For many members of the West Colfax Corridor redevelopment as concept is creating a sense of fear for those who may not have the means to dictate where they will be in the future.

All three neighborhoods involved in this study have a higher percentage of families in poverty than the 7-County Denver Metro Area, Sun Valley having the highest at 83%. With families moving into West Colfax buying houses averaging \$250,000, (more than tripling over the last 5 years), families who have been in the neighborhood for generations could start to disappear as they get, priced out by a new wave of predominantly white headed households

The plans and studies done within the context of the West Colfax Corridor, especially along the rail line, have had a particular emphasis on ideas of livable and affordable communities. In many cases there is the belief that transit- oriented communities are optimal for affordable housing, since many low income individuals do not have access to a car, making access to transit a necessity in the scope of a residents overall quality of life.

Overall, private development in the West Colfax neighborhood is skewed toward market rate/high end developments, with much of the responsibility of creating affordable housing falling on nonprofits. ULC's Mile High Vista and the Jody Apartments, along with properties developed by Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, the Denver Housing Authority and Del Norte have been the central providers of affordable housing stock within the corridor. However, there is a gap in the supply of housing; low income affordability, specifically a lack of low income single family or for sale housing. The CDOT study commissioned by the WLCC, recommended the development of an affordable housing strategy for both preservation and new production. If a strategy has been developed it has not been made public knowledge, or referred to on their website. The WLCC in itself was not a permanent entity; it is not clear as to whether or not they followed the CDOT study recommendation of becoming a formalized partnership seeing as though they have a website that has not been updated since the study was published. There is also no date on the study.

The Housing Development Assistance Fund (HDAF) that was part of the DLP grant worked to preserve land for affordable housing within one-half mile of transit stations. However, the fare structure of the Light Rail is financially out of reach for the low income individuals developers imagine will live in these transit-oriented developments. With the West Side Transit Enhancement study, the Decatur- Federal Station area plan, the TOD Strategic Plan and HDAF being four of the six projects the grant was used for, DLP was centered on transit. So, it is surprising to see that the issue of affordability and access could have been overlooked in the process of hoping to create livable transit-oriented development with a strong emphasis on affordable housing.

Recommendations in the St. Anthony's task force document from 2006 were in many cases disregarded, for example, creating a mixed income neighborhood by creating housing for higher income families while also

seeking to avoid displacement of low to moderate income families in the surrounding community. With the spike in housing prices displacement is a reality, and the St. Anthony's development has barely begun construction on the site. Additionally, the context of health and wellness within the development has been replaced with the lure of high end housing.

Strategic planning for the Rail aspect of the corridor had been a driving force in the redevelopment of West Colfax, along with the commercial development along Colfax. With the two areas of emphasis running parallel to each other, the promises of major development, along with development that has already occurred within the corridor, has created a somewhat centrifugal trajectory of development for the West Colfax neighborhood, moving from the inside, out. Sun Valley however, seems to have a centripetal force of development acting upon the neighborhood. Development efforts of downtown Denver and West Colfax threaten to swallow the existing affordable housing community, in an effort to connect the neighborhood to the rest of Denver.

Understandings of physical space as expressed in the constructs of space sections of the report are radically different concepts and spaces in the minds of residents vs. developers/entities that are looking at the West Colfax corridor. Developers see the neighborhoods as connected based on the West Line Rail and neighborhood's proximity to one another but that is not the case for many residents. For residents these neighborhoods have very distinct physical and socially constructed barriers between neighborhoods and in the case of West Colfax even within themselves.

- Food Access

- In attending the food access neighborhood meetings in West Colfax, there was a large focus on the lack of access to fresh healthy food in the neighborhood. They spoke of their neighborhood being a food desert.
- According to the data from the Piton Foundation, within West Colfax 14% of low income people and 25% of children have low access to healthy food within a mile. To set in context, Villa Park 5% of low income people, and 9% of children have low access to healthy food within 1 mile, and in Sun Valley 99% of low income people and 99.5% of children have low access to healthy food within 1 mile. With this it seems as though efforts to bring food into the West Colfax area need to be closely tied to and collaborated with efforts in the Sun Valley Neighborhood.

- Schools

- There are only six schools in the West Colfax Corridor: Fairview<sup>8</sup>, Colfax<sup>9</sup>, Cheltenham<sup>10</sup>, Eagleton<sup>11</sup> and Cowell<sup>12</sup> are elementary schools, each with at least 90% of their students on free or reduced lunch<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://media.dpsk12.org/enrollmentsnapshots/ES238.PDF>

<sup>9</sup> <http://media.dpsk12.org/enrollmentsnapshots/ES219.PDF>

<sup>10</sup> <http://media.dpsk12.org/enrollmentsnapshots/ES218.PDF>

<sup>11</sup> <http://media.dpsk12.org/enrollmentsnapshots/ES228.PDF>

<sup>12</sup> <http://media.dpsk12.org/enrollmentsnapshots/ES224.PDF>

This sixth school is a new alternative Charter High School, Rise Up Community School that opened the Fall of 2015.

- Sun Valley with the highest percentage of children has only Fairview Elementary, which is also the lowest performing school, being on accredited probation, earning a 17%, only 24 of the possible 145 possible points on the school performance score card.
- Of the five schools, Colfax Elementary is the only school that is meeting expectations, earning a 55% overall, with its highest category being Student Growth at 61%.
- Development in the West Colfax will affect both Sun Valley and Villa Park. It can set precedents for future development in Villa Park, or it could be a catalyst for the long discussed redevelopment of Sun Valley by DHA.
- More attention needs to be paid to the interaction between West Colfax and Sloan's Lake neighborhoods.
  - When speaking about the St. Anthony's redevelopment it became clear that although the development is taking place in West Colfax community, it is also affecting Sloan's Lake and the future use of Sloan's Lake. There are also concerns about traffic and the increased density of residents and how it will affect the Sloan's Lake neighborhood. Sloan's Lake also seems to take a contradictory stance to WeCAN's pro-development stance. Sloan's lake residents seem to have more reservations about the St. Anthony's development.
- In many respondents' opinions, community benefits are an after-thought in larger developments.
  - An overall community benefit space such as a library or resource center, are not as highly considered as most respondents would like in the scheme of large scale redevelopment. For example, many are concerned that the connectivity and community feel that they appreciate about the West Colfax or Villa Park neighborhoods will disappear once high density residences are built at St. Anthony's and possibly around Light Rail Stations.
- Among West Colfax and Villa Park residents interviewed, and Sun Valley property owners interviewed, there is a general sense of content about the area finally getting attention. However most are not happy with the small scale development,, concentrated in West Colfax, where smaller private developers buy and scrape homes. Many respondents referred to it as "wedging" duplexes on small lots in between existing homes or building quick "paper homes" next to old craftsman homes. Many are also afraid that a trend in higher density housing is beginning to outweigh quality housing.
- All residents interviewed as part of this report are worried about the large scale developments either in progress or still in the planning stage.
  - St. Anthony's current development process and the future of Sun Valley are topics of concern. In many cases talk of development is closely tied or used within the same context as ideas and conversations of gentrification.
- Almost all the respondents commented that they would like to see some kind of intentionality in the development of West Colfax Corridor. Whether that is minimizing displacement, creating spaces for

community profit, or building a local restaurant or bodega to bring fresh local food into the community. However, until there is a realistically walkable way to connect Sun Valley to the West Colfax/Villa Park communities they will not be connected. Projects developed on the other side of Federal with the intention of benefiting Sun Valley, will most likely not be used by Sun Valley Residents. Many West Colfax and Villa Park residents use the Library due to its accessibility via car, bike or foot. The newly developed way finding signs and bike path through the West Colfax neighborhood

- The information gathered suggests that there needs to be a way for the communities to connect that is safe and pedestrian friendly. Until then development that is meant to have an impact on these neighborhoods along the rail line, will be limited to whatever neighborhood the development effort is built within.
  - For example, the Corky Gonzales Library and Rudy Recreation Center. Though both are meant to serve the West Colfax Corridor they are predominantly used or limited in use by those within the neighborhoods where they are built. Without pedestrian friendly connections of neighborhoods amenities within the West Colfax Corridor will remain silo-ed in their respective community.
  - There is excitement surrounding the Re-Imagine Play project in Paco Sanchez, hopefully the project will set a precedent for connectivity among the three neighborhoods. According to the Planning section of the Denver Parks and Recreation website construction is supposed to begin in 2016. However, their FAQ page, does note that the construction will be phased and depend heavily on the availability of funds in order to complete the project. They currently have around \$2.5M, the total budget is projected to be \$5M.

Ultimately, all 3 neighborhoods have very distinct ideas of themselves and how they relate to each other. Though there is a very large presence of non-profit and community organizations, it does not seem as though there is one unifying organization that has a significant presence in each of the communities discussed in this report. This absence of synergy could be feeding the affordable housing crisis. In both West Colfax and Villa Park the affordable housing stock is dwindling. The St. Anthony's Task Force Recommendations document has set goals for affordable housing; however as mentioned before, neither residents nor community organizations are advocating the use of document as a guide for development along the corridor. This could be because the document only addresses West Colfax and the Development of St. Anthony's. There are no known documents or recommendations that employed participation of all three neighborhoods. From observing the concerns of the three neighborhoods it is clear they could benefit from the creation of a document similar to the St. Anthony's Task Force. The document could provide mutually agreed upon development principles and goals along the corridor. However, the St. Anthony's Task force of 2006 was commissioned by the Mayor's office. In this instance given the climate of development in the Corridor the process would have to be self- initiated by the neighborhoods, or initiated by a community organization that has a presence within all three neighborhoods.