Sunken Gardens Park Master Plan

Advisory Committee Meeting #1
July 9, 2020

DENVER PARKS & RECREATION
Today’s Agenda

• Welcome and Project Overview
• Team Introductions
• Advisory Committee: Roles/Responsibilities
• Advisory Committee Introductions
• Phase 1 Assessments Overview
• Questions/Answer Period
• Homework Assignment: Goals and Objectives
• Closing Comments
### Project Team

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Advisory Committee Members: Thank you!

Denver Health                  Stephanie Syner
Denver Housing Authority        Stella Madrid
Mental Health Center of Denver  Michael Niyompang
Atlantis Community, Inc.        Mike Comenole
La Alma/Lincoln Park Neighborhood Assoc. Lisa Shusko
West Early College @ West Campus Mia Martinez
City Council District 3: Jaime Torres Ben Chavez
City Council At-large: Debbie Ortega Susan Aldretti
Boys and Girls Club             Julius Flores
River Sisters                   Jorge Figuerosa
First Mennonite Church          Claudia Aguilar
Golden Triangle Neighborhood    Liz Orr
Santa Fe Drive Corridor         Dr. Ramon Del Castillo
Stakeholders and Community Partners: The list is increasing!

La Alma/Lincoln Park Neighborhood Assoc.
Center City Denver Residents Organization
Cultural Arts Residential Organization
Golden Triangle Creative District
Baker Historic Neighborhood District
Historic Denver
History Colorado
Denver Urban Gardens: Elati Comm. Garden
The Boulevard Apartments
Downtown Denver Partnership
Specialized Foundation
TIAA Financial Services
His Love Fellowship
Scum of the Earth Church
Compassion Rd Academy High School (DPS)
Downtown Animal Care Center
The Center for Animal Wellness
Council District 10

West Denver Renaissance Collaborative*
Santa Fe Business Improvement District*
Arts District of Santa Fe*
Su Teatro*
West Leadership Academy (DPS)*
Center for Talent Development at Greenlee (DPS)*
Denver Center for International Studies (DPS)*
Girls Athletic Leadership School (DPS)*
Council District 7
Upper Santa Fe Neighbors
West Denver United
Maxfund Wellness Center
Bikes Together
La Alma Recreation Center
UCD LA Students
Chicano Murals Project
Historic Denver/ArtHyve
Athletic Director: West High Leadership

....and many individuals: residents, business owners, etc.

Please let us know if you have people/entities to add to this list!
Phase 1: Assessments
Overview

The Context:
Neighborhood Assessment

The Park:
Site Assessment

The History:
Historic Assessment

Overview
All included in a document that is posted to the city’s project page.
There are 3 components:

The Context – a look at the demographics within a 10-minute walking distance of the park.

The Park – Physical Attributes that exist today

Historic Assessment – what used to be there, what is left and why is it important
**Phase 1: Neighborhood Assessment**

- 5 Neighborhoods
- Council District 3 (10 just east of Speer)
- BID: Santa Fe, South Broadway
- Arts District: Santa Fe, Golden Triangle
- Institutions: DPS – West Campus
- Employer: Denver Health Campus

Walk Shed: The Game Plan for a Healthy City (adopted by CC in 2019) includes an Implementation Strategy that all neighborhoods have a park within a 10 minute walk.

This is a Walk Shed that is delineated on this diagram. No direct route to park.

This is the area that was studied in the Neighborhood Assessment.

5 neighborhoods: La Alma/Lincoln Park, Civic Center and the Golden Triangle, Capitol Hill, Baker and the NW corner of the Speer Neighborhood.

Located on the eastern edge of District 3, although District 10 is just east of Speer.

1 Business Improvement District (called a BID) and that is the Santa Fe BID located east of the park – within 5 blocks of the park.

The South Broadway Business Improvement District lies just south of the walkshed,

Important commercial uses on Broadway between 5th and 11th within the walkshed.

West Campus, home to two schools: The West Leadership School and West Early College, and Denver Health to the south of 8th Avenue, whose campus has expanded significantly over the years.
Phase 1: Neighborhood Assessment

Key Findings

- Rapid Growth: 28% in 10 years
- Chicano Roots: 44%, and growing
- Employment: 10,000 Health Related Workers
- Range of Demographics: Age, Children

Rapid Growth. While the City of Denver overall has experienced significant growth since 2010 (growing at a rate of 22%), within a 10-minute walk of Sunken Gardens the growth rate has been even higher, at 28%. The most significant area of growth has been within the Civic Center (Golden Triangle) neighborhood, directly east of Sunken Gardens. This neighborhood grew at a rate of 50% from 2010 to 2019.

Chicano Roots. Sunken Gardens is an important geographical site for the Chicano Rights Movement – El Movimiento – and the neighborhoods to the west and south of Sunken Gardens have strong, place-based connections to the movement’s legacy. The Chicano, Mexican and Latinx population (referred to by Census data as Hispanic origin) is a greater percentage of the population in La Alma Lincoln Park and Baker than in the City of Denver, at 44% and 38% respectively, compared to 33%. This population in these two neighborhoods has grown 7- to-10% since 2010. Of the 1,200 students at West Early College and West Leadership Academy, housed within the West High School Campus, over 80% are Chicano, Mexican and Latinx.

Major Health-Based Employers. Some of Denver’s largest, and most well-known, employers are located within 10-minutes of Sunken Gardens, including Denver Health, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and two Denver Public Schools at the West High School campus. Combined, Denver Health and Anthem bring approximately 10,000 health-related workers to the area during the week. Denver Health sees 930,000 patient visits annually.

22% of households have 1 or more persons with a disability.
The proximity to health care and housing opportunities most likely contributes to this.

There are over 4,000 housing units: 69% are rental, 29% are owner-occupied.
Business Journal announcement for a groundbreaking ceremony for a new 90+ unit affordable housing project on 6th Avenue – offering up condominiums for ownership.
Nomination Form for the Register of Historic Places, Sunken Gardens was described as an embellishment to Speer Boulevard. The configuration is not unique to park, the triangles reflect a pattern of similarly configured spaces that you see up and down Speer Boulevard where the channelized Cherry Creek bisects the street grid.

Sunken Gardens consists of two primary areas:
Northern Triangle, which includes the open expanse of lawn in front of the West Campus and serves both the neighborhood and the schools, and provides much needed unprogrammed open space
Southern Triangle contains the dense groves of evergreen trees, playground and shelter and picnic tables just north of 8th Avenue.....a naturalistic glen with rolling, undulating forms focused on a swale – all below grade.
It is important to note that the short, steep in some places and not so much in others – that you see on all sides of the park contribute to the character of the park and the Historic Register mandates the preservation of this features.
Views

View to State Capitol from the Pavilion

From Speer Boulevard looking towards West High and – the pavilion is now gone

Views from Elati back towards Speer

Views into the groves of the Southern Triangle

Views from the northern tip of the park towards 9th Avenue

Views from the Southern Triangle to the open lawn in the Northern Triangle
Edges, Access and Circulation

Edges and Access
- West Campus
- Parkway Apts.
- 6th/8th Avenue
- Denver Health
- Golden Triangle
- Elati Street
- 11th/Speer Inters.
- 9th Avenue
- Delaware Street

Circulation
- Perimeter Walk
- Primary Trail (North/South)
- Connecting Paths

Edges of the park have undergone significant change over time.

West High was constructed, which exemplifies an emerging trend to locate new schools next to iconic parks:
- North front Speer Boulevard and Viking Park, East flanks the Esplanade at Sullivan Gate which is the entrance to City Park off of Colfax, South High is the terminus for Washington Park – and here West was constructed on the edge of Sunken Gardens. Resulting in one of the most iconic views along Speer, the campus suddenly cut off several direct connections from the Lincoln Park neighborhood to the Western edge of the park.

Subsequent changes to the edge include:

Construction of The Parkway Apartments up at the northern tip of the park creating tall residential structures impeding access from the northern neighborhood

6th Avenue and 8th Avenue were converted to one-way commuter arterials, making it very difficult to access the park from the south.

8th Avenue is now 4 lanes of traffic.

Denver Health and West Campus – both critical and coveted community institutions – begin to expand their campuses and which makes it necessary to either cut through the campus or seek a less direct route to the park

Current, explosive growth of the Golden Triangle create a very definitive edge to the east, funneling pedestrians to limited access points – either to the very north or very southern edge of the park.

There was once on-street parallel parking along Speer and that entire eastern edge of the park making access quite easy and manageable. Now you have approximately 1,800 LF of park edge with no direct connections to the park.
Edges, Access and Circulation slide continued.

Elati Street serves as parking and loading for the West Campus, and when school is in session you can see buses stacked up end to end on one side, and diagonal parking on the other. You could not design nor construct that condition now - the city requires trees and water quality components that would fragment those long, uninterrupted edge conditions...and provide intermittent pedestrian access.

At the intersection of 11th and Speer you have very high speed traffic veering off of Speer onto Elati – there is no crosswalk here.

9th Avenue used to traverse the park and has been closed to vehicular traffic, but serves as an important accessible entrance to the park, and links directly with the Bannock St Bridge at a signalized intersection.

Delaware St – a gorgeous tree-lined block – a quiet island with a few original scaled structures, multi-family residences, businesses and the Mennonite Church on the corner.

But one you get to the park – is a wonderful, safe space. It’s depressed, lower than the surrounding streets – thus the name Sunken – and the trail system in the park is extensive – comprised of a hierarchy of walks

The Perimeter Walk – concrete sidewalks that allow a pedestrian to walk the entire perimeter of the park and we’ve seen Denver Health employees out there during their breaks
The Primary Trail linking the northern and southern triangles
Historic paved paths in the Southern Triangle
And additional paved sections that were once likely short cuts but have now been paved
Water resources have historically been a major feature of the park.

There was a water fall in the Southern Triangle along with a running brook that captured water out of Cherry Creek and ran it through the "grotto" – remnants of which can be seen near 8th Ave.

The reflecting pool was once a free and accessible wading pool that offered ice skating in the winter.

And we believe that there were once small motes feeding the formal gardens at the northern tip of the park.

We cannot replicate these historic elements, this diagram illustrates the extensive system of stormwater drainage facilities in the park, and it could be possible – if this proved to be an objective of the project – to capture some of this run-off using water quality detailing in a garden setting – often referred to as rain gardens.
The trees in the park – are one of the most memorable features of the park. The trees are phenomenal. There are specimen trees – and these create picture postcard groves in the Southern Triangle that are comprised of both deciduous and evergreen species.

Denver did a massive replanting of elms in the 1990s that resulted in what is now an established, health linear edge that frames the views to the West Campus. And the “elm lined boulevard” is a memorable and shared experience for park users throughout the country.
A series of existing structures ranging from historic Gazebo in the Southern Triangle, the remnants of the structural edge of the reflecting pool and the foundation of the pavilion in the Northern Triangle along with newer structures such as the playground, picnic shelter and the picnic tables are scattered throughout the park.

There are also some structures that have been adapted for different uses such as the basketball court and the toolhouse.

We have noted that in both our research and our visits to the park that the foundation of the pavilion – to this day - serves as a major destination for park visitors and also a platform for cultural events, for groups of people as seen in the historic photos of the West High Walkout and for the announcement of referendums and ideas as well as for simply climbing and exploring by local kids.

In summary,
Residents’ perception of the park is closely tied to the history of the park
We know that we have an incomplete history of the park and the role that is has played in cultural events
There are tremendous opportunities here to serve the evolving neighborhoods
We can do more by better understanding the past and anticipating the future needs of residents and visitors
And we can create a real jewel located on the edge of Downtown Denver
Phase 1: Historic Assessment

Key Findings

- Evolving Uses of Historic Structures
- Significant Structures/Spaces
- Reinterpretation: Water in the Park

This effort supplements quite a bit of existing information on the history of the park and its structures... It leverages work done in conjunction with getting the park system on the National Register of Historic Places And the 2001 Historical Overview and the 2003 Cultural Landscape Assessment

That to highlight one theme of this assessment is to acknowledge the role that CHANGE has played in the evolution of the park
We just spoke about how the foundation of the pavilion has come to serve as destination or platform to give neighborhoods and communities a voice.

The Historic Assessment inventories each historic element of the park. Significant features of the park include:

2 Distinct Triangles – the spatial configuration of the park
The Topography
Gateways
Perimeter Walk
North South Primary Path
Toolhouse
Views
Vegetation
Base/Foundation of Pavilion

These elements combine to create an iconic and treasured park that offers significant potential both for preservation and interpretation.
We know that the historic timeline that we have for the park is incomplete. We have extensive documentation of park history up through the 1950s, and we need to expand the timeline right up to present day. COVID-19 has impacted how the park is currently being used and should be included on the timeline. Many of you have lived and worked in the neighborhood for a long time and we are seeking your input to help us complete this timeline.
Questions and Answers
Goals and Objectives:
Deadline – Thursday, July 23rd.

1. Review The Game Plan Overview
2. Draft (3) Goals that you believe are critical to the successful future of SG
3. Add a corresponding objective / outcome for each goal statement that will serve as evidence that the goal has been achieved

Email/Text Photo/Mail to Heather Noyes:
heather@studiocpg.com

Example: Goal - Improve pedestrian connectivity to Sunken Gardens Park
Example: Objective – Install a series of signalized crosswalks at each intersection
Next Meeting:

August 6th, 5:30pm  1st Thursday of each month at 5:30pm
Goals and Objectives

Resources:
• 2019 The Game Plan for A Healthy City
• Denver Outdoor Downtown Plan

Sunken Gardens Park Master Plan Project Page:
• Phase I Assessments
• Link to Project Survey (forthcoming)
• All future project information including a copy of today’s PPT

Denver.gov/parksplanning – Sunken Gardens Master Plan