

# West Area Plan West Plan Small Working Group Meeting #4



Date and Time: June 22, 2022 at 4 pm  
Location: Zoom

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## Attendees

### WORKING GROUP MEMBERS (PRESENT)

Chala Mohr  
Kathy Sandoval  
Elizabeth Walsh  
Heidi Newhart

Jeanne Granville  
Jonathan Pira  
Sean Brady  
Evon Lopez

### ELECTED OFFICIALS/COUNCIL DISTRICT AIDES

Katie Heideman, Council Aide, District 3

### COMMUNITY PLANNING PROJECT TEAM

Valerie Herrera  
Eugene Howard  
Courtland Hyser

## Meeting Summary

### Main Takeaways:

#### Overall:

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## AGENDA

1. **Overview of Ecology Based Planning Document with Cloverleaf used as example**  
*(Heidi – 30 min)*
2. **Re-focus back to map analysis for the following maps** *(1.5hrs)*
  - Existing Land Use
  - Existing Zoning
  - BP Future Places
  - Environmental Quality Recommendations
  - Recommended Opportunities
  - Recommended Building Heights

## NOTES

1. **Overview of Ecology-Based Planning Document (Heidi)**
  - Document was written by an ecologist with Heidi's input. Has not been vetted more broadly than that. Uses water as the starting point for envisioning future development.
  - The process led by the BID/Dan Shah identified many things that most people want (jobs, affordable housing, connections to the river). But the resulting design was fairly typical in the sense that it identified roads for cars and planned for development on the resulting blocks.
  - West planning process is also typical in that it's driven by Blueprint Denver.
  - There is a 100-year floodplain in this area. How do we plan for water and the river? This would create a design that is driven by nature.
  - Approach uses a "scale of permanence" that starts with natural features like drainage, then people and vegetation, then cars and transit, and finally buildings.
  - The document's focus on the cloverleaf is intended to just be an example: work out the details here, and then apply the concepts more broadly elsewhere.
  - Most of the floodplain is located in three of the four quadrants of the cloverleaf, leaving the southwest quadrant most available for development.

- The conventional approach to planning is “extraction-based” and this approach is “ecology and resilience-based”. The hope is that it would result in improved equity as well.
- Elizabeth- River Sisters is not just a project, but also highlights governance principles that can be replicated elsewhere. This approach is an example of this approach applied to a different location. Development and green infrastructure working together. There is no possibility for equity if we don’t have healthy access to land and air. Financial capital is a resource to invest for the purpose of generating community health and not just more financial wealth. Interested in how we could bring this to other aspects of the plan, perhaps through use of tools like performance zoning. Atlanta is a good example of a city that approached its planning in this way: look at the land first, then plan development around that, and incorporate historical causes of present-day inequities.
- Sean- New Orleans shows what happens when you don’t respect the land, because the city is sinking, so if you’re in the floodplain there, you’re “screwed”. Building around how the land is situated is the way that development was historically done. Would the intent here be to build along the floodplains?
- Heidi- Not really. This would inform what goes where, but the code should guide where development goes, specifically. We wouldn’t just want to put a grid on top of the land that’s not in the floodplain. It’s an open question how this information would inform what goes where, specifically.
- Val- Is the question before us how this approach should influence the plan’s land use recommendations?
- Heidi- Yes, this isn’t the only place there’s water. How do we make sure what happens in these areas is aligned with how the land is situated?
- Jeanne- Sees this as a more ecological framing for development rather than the conventional way it’s done. How does this affect the development potential of this area? Can you build in the 100 year floodplain today?
- Kathy- you can’t build in a floodway, but you can build in a floodplain if you mitigate for the potential for flooding.
- Evon- Water is the base for everything in Native American culture. They planned around water because water is life.
- Courtland and Eugene- reinforced Kathy’s previous comments on mitigation for floodplain development.
- Sean- Would land use changes or green infrastructure modify the floodplain?
- Courtland- Not really, but that is a helpful approach for managing water within a drainage basin. Projects that modify the floodplain are more likely to be large infrastructure projects that change the capacity of waterways.
- Heidi- Water doesn’t fit into a grid, which is why it needs to be considered first. This is a different way of thinking because it forces the development to respond to the water instead of the other way around. If there was a flood event, then the land would be more able to absorb it.
- Kathy- How does development happen in a floodplain? It looks like MeowWolf is located in the floodplain—what did they do to mitigate?
- Elizabeth- Land use is policies for how we use land in order to be able to live well. How do we create policies for how we have relationships with the land that creates intergenerational health and wealth? Codes establish how we manage and use the land.

“highest and best use” is based on financial return, but the long term approach for having that land continue that indefinitely may mean using it differently from what appears to deliver the biggest financial return. Land remains in private ownership. Performance standards can help to provide flexibility and creativity in how that land is used. Pre-zoning, we had a walkable city but in close proximity to noxious uses. Once Euclidian zoning was introduced, that walkability was destroyed. How do we get the best of both worlds? Is there some industrial ecology work from Eugene’s class that could be helpful here? How do we govern the use of the land for the wellbeing of all, and how would that be reflected in the code?

## 2. Re-Focus Back to Map Analysis

- Kathy- Environmental Quality Map: Sheridan strip malls near the gulch—the gulch is buried at this location. The city did a gulch plan recently. How do we incentivize integration of the gulch with the rest of the built environment so people can use it? There are a lot of opportunities for this: enhancing and connecting to different waterways.
- Jeanne- has a lot of questions about upzoning she sees in Sun Valley and wants to know where this came from. 12 stories and similar recs; doesn’t remember doing this.
- Val- should we talk about this here, or set up office hours?
- Elizabeth- a little bit of both. Let’s talk about where this came from. Probably a combination of Blueprint Denver and community input.
- Jeanne- a lot of these maps look like the status quo. What’s reflecting the existing condition, what comes from Blueprint Denver, and what’s new? Understanding this will help to explain a lot.
- Eugene- Building heights map captures several things: Blueprint Denver guidance as a starting point/foundation, how to promote more affordable housing on-site (especially via the new EHA program), and we tried to put out a map that showed the greatest potential that includes EHA incentives. This is how you get to 12 stories in some areas. It’s important to note that this doesn’t mean you’ll get 12 stories throughout these areas, just that this is as high as you could go if you leveraged all of the incentives.
- Jeanne- I hear that it’s not intended to be prescriptive, but what if the Planning Board uses this as an excuse? They’ve already done this for changing the zoning for the DHA campus: because it was in the station area, the change was made. But I hear what you’re saying.
- Eugene- in the instance of someone taking advantage of EHA incentives, they would have to produce the extra units in trade for the additional height. If someone doesn’t want to build the housing, they’re limited to 8 stories max.
- Heidi- The height map gets at the general tension point between this plan, Blueprint Denver, and the community. We haven’t seen extra density produce affordability. EHA isn’t strong enough to solve for affordability. Meanwhile the other factors that add value and livability to an area aren’t there. This is a reductive solution, so how do we ensure that QoL considerations are also a part of height and density and not just carrying forward Blueprint Denver recommendations?
- Jonathan- What is the group’s concern about height? Is hearing a lot of comments about too much of it being a concern/problem. For heat island, density doesn’t add to heat

island and can help to solve it. In hot climates you often see tall buildings (that cast shade) with narrow alleys. There also seems to be a concern that more density creates more unaffordability. Rather than density, shouldn't we focus on form, performance/impacts? Density can help solve these problems. Is happy to see the EHA, because it basically requires affordable units for any development over 10 units. I'm not so worried about height and density as the impact that buildings have on the neighborhoods around them. I'm mostly upset that the plan's heights are so low, especially near transit facilities and park amenities.

- Eugene- I lived in the Bay Area for a number of years and saw first hand that the cities that most strictly limit the housing supply are the same ones with the biggest affordability problems.
- Jeanne- Sun Valley is a valley. This is a factor because people are really hemmed in and there's little green space. The park that's planned for this area is too much concrete and not enough green space. People with low mobility or advanced age don't see transit as a benefit because it's too hard to get to or requires too much physical ability to use. Need better amenities and more green space to improve quality of life for residents. Sun Valley already has more affordable housing than anywhere else, so it's doing its part in this respect. More affordable housing is fine, but it can be provided in 8 stories rather than 12. The city is a big place and this doesn't all need to be concentrated in Sun Valley.
- Heidi- I would have fewer concerns about height and density if I felt that QoL considerations were more prominent. I don't trust that they will be provided because the content from the QoL section isn't integrates with the land use content—it's totally separate. I would be more comfortable if we were planning around water, like in the cloverleaf example, and then 20 stories at that location might be okay. West Colfax has a dynamic business district that was destroyed in the 70s and hasn't come back, and yet lots of housing and density has been added. Even with this new development, we still have to get into our cars to access goods and services.
- Eugene- Far Northeast example: when it comes to parks and open space, DPR has criteria and standards that must be met in order for land to count as park, and if these aren't met, it's simply drainage area and doesn't count towards the park requirement. The city holds firm on these standards.
- Jonathan- Agrees with Heidi, but the plan is meant to be taken as a whole. Whatever has been mapped is intended to happen. The desire is to guarantee the green amenities before development takes place, but those other things might need to be done first. If we say that heights should be low because we're worried that we'll just get the housing, then the real danger is that we'll get nothing. Agrees with Jeanne that higher density in Sun Valley mostly inappropriate because of all of the historical upzonings that happened here and not at all in more affluent neighborhoods. So the equitable thing would be to upzone other areas that haven't had any change, and not also do it to Sun Valley. It's inequitable to upzone Sun Valley again while continuing to preserve the Barnums as low density. How do we fix the missing middle references in this document? This plan includes duplexes as missing middle, while it's actually 4-8 units. Minneapolis example shows how 12 units can be accommodated in a footprint that might have otherwise been just one. Thinks this type of development wouldn't be possible under this plan. Wants to have office hours session to talk about this in more detail.

- Kathy- I hear what Jonathan is saying, but I don't see density producing affordable housing. What we're seeing is the opposite, with more units remaining unaffordable, and this changes the neighborhood's demographics. New residents don't connect to the community as a whole. Transit use remains low, and the number of Lyfts and Ubers increases. We're limiting the ability for families to leverage homeownership into intergenerational wealth. Country Club won't see affordable units because it doesn't allow multi-unit development. Multi-unit development is typically rental, and renting doesn't build intergenerational wealth. Upzoning happened when the form-based code was adopted, and this created a lot of the scrapes and redevelopment we've seen since then. We need to look at this closely and unpack it.
- Val- Should we use all of next week's meeting to continue this land use discussion, or just the first hour?
- Eugene- will be able to attend only part of next week's meeting. I'm a new resident and use transit. The plan supports expanded transit. In Barcelona, I never had to look at a train schedule because they came every few minutes and were the best way to get around. There's not one part of the plan that should be looked at in isolation, you need to look at all of the layers together and I know this is what this group has been trying to do in these sessions.
- Elizabeth- We'll pick up the conversation next week and focus on land use again. Focus needs to be on integrating these concepts together, as Eugene was saying. I don't know of any place in the country that requires community benefits if you tear something down and build luxury units instead. There have been a lot of scrapes in my neighborhood. We need to talk about how to grow and change without displacement.