
Lone Tree TAP Report

A Clear, Viable Vision for the Entertainment District

Lone Tree, Colorado

ULI Colorado

Technical Advisory Panel (TAP)

December 3-4, 2012



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Leadership in Responsible Land Use

About the Urban Land Institute (www.uli.org): Founded in 1936, ULI is the preeminent nonprofit research and educational organization addressing land use. ULI's 27,000 members internationally draw from 26 professions including architects, attorneys, brokers, developers, elected officials, and urban planners. District Councils are ULI at the local level supporting best practices in land use. With 1000 members, ULI Colorado engages its members to participate in their community through educational programs, advisory panels and mentoring.

ULI Advisory Services: Since 1947, the national ULI Advisory Services program has assembled 400+ ULI-member teams to find solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, community revitalization, workforce housing, and more. ULI Colorado's Technical Advisory Panels (TAPs) offer the same type of expertise at the local level. Panels consist of qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure objectivity.

ULI Colorado
A District Council of the Urban Land Institute
730 17th Street, Suite 630
Denver, Colorado 80202
P: 303.893.1760 F: 303.893.1762
EMAIL: colorado@uli.org WEBSITE: colorado.uli.org

CHAIR: Chris Achenbach, Zocalo Community Development
VICE CHAIR: Ismael Guerrero, Denver Housing Authority
TAPS CHAIRS: Al Colussy, Klipp GKK Works
Arleen Taniwaki, ArLand Land Use Economics

STAFF LEADERSHIP: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Michael Leccese DIRECTOR: Kacey Wilkins

REPORT DESIGN: Ekstrand Creative, LLC

I. Introduction

ULI Colorado thanks the City of Lone Tree and its citizens, merchants, developers, volunteers, City Council, members of City boards and commissions, and especially city staff for their impressive organization and generous hosting of this event.

On December 3-4, 2012, the Colorado District Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI Colorado) convened a Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to study the future of the Lone Tree Entertainment District. At the city's invitation, the ULI TAP assembled six land-use experts who volunteered to offer objective advice. For the two-day study, the panel reviewed a detailed advance packet of planning and demographic data, toured the Entertainment District, interviewed local stakeholders, including city officials and longtime property and business owners.

Newer suburbs of Metro Denver include some of the most economically vibrant and well-educated areas within the region. Lone Tree is a prime example of such a community. In addition, Lone Tree is becoming a place where residents can live, work and play with such amenities as rec centers, hiking trails, shopping, growing job centers, and a brand-new performing arts center.



Steve Hebert of City of Lone Tree leads panelists on a site tour on Dec. 3



Park Meadows Drive is too wide and fast for pedestrians and cyclists but could be retrofitted to be friendlier to people and transit

By the nature of their newness, communities such as Lone Tree have just begun to mature as places. They were also shaped by an auto-dominated culture that is starting to change as appealing alternatives such as light rail, bikeways, and shady pedestrian paths emerge as part of the suburban landscape.

Communities such as Lakewood (Belmar redevelopment) and Centennial (Streets at Southglenn) have made the most of these opportunities to inject new economic vitality and walkable gathering places into their cityscapes.

In the Entertainment District, Lone Tree has a great chance to create a place it can be proud of. There is good news on several fronts. One is that the Entertainment District does not have to be razed and remade. Elements in place can and should be preserved and nurtured. A growing medical sector is providing jobs, re-using buildings, and creating an identity. Multifamily residential neighborhoods are within a short walk. A movie theater and restaurants provide an anchor for more development. Naturalized drainageways could easily become featured parks and open spaces.

Moreover, Lone Tree has the political will and economic might to start transforming the Entertainment District into something better. The first steps are not difficult. City officials can meet with key business and property owners (particularly the theater owners) to determine what kind of support they need to retain, expand or improve. The city can lead on the formation of such organizational structures as a revived Business Improvement District and a Metro District. Lone Tree can dedicate existing funds toward a pilot project, such as a streetscape or plaza improvement.

Hard work remains to develop a practical vision to guide redevelopment of the Entertainment District over time. The findings and recommendations of this report provide a place to launch this process and a map toward results.

See sections III and IV of this report for more panel findings and recommendations.



II. Background and Problem Statement

In the 1990s, the Lone Tree Entertainment District was conceived as a vibrant theater, sports and entertainment complex to include United Artist Theater, an indoor baseball/basketball facility, a Polar Ice indoor skating rink, Club Disney, bowling/laser tag complex, a large sporting goods store, several theme restaurants and a hotel. Over the years other businesses were proposed, some of which opened and then closed, others were approved but not built. Today, United Artists Theater, Brunswick Lanes, Sky Ventures Indoor Skydiving, the Element Hotel, the Lone Tree Athletic Club, several restaurants and financial institutions and a host of other business constitute the Entertainment District.

Through no fault of the city (which did not exist as politic entity then), the vision of the Entertainment District was never fulfilled. The District has evolved into a disparate mix of uses with the following problems:

- Lack of cohesive identity. For example, there is no critical mass of entertainment uses to define an Entertainment District
- No defined edges or entryways
- Park Meadows Drive both divides the district into two areas, and funnels people through the district as much as to it.
- At least 62 different property owners, several which are out-of-state, and varied landlord/tenant relationships
- No overall management association or district to fund improvements, property maintenance or marketing
- A Business Improvement District was formed in 2001 to fund street, water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer improvements, but only included some properties



Although RTD's light rail station is not in the Entertainment District, the proximity of transit creates a major opportunity.

- Poor visibility for some businesses from Park Meadows Drive and Yosemite
- Lack of clear internal circulation
- Lack of pedestrian connections (especially across Park Meadows Drive)
- No master sign program
- Lack of landscape amenities at the UA Plaza/overall center
- Some business turnover that may threaten long-term economic viability
- Several key sites and buildings have been vacant for years and other leases could be coming up
- C-470 creates physical barrier to Park Meadows Mall
- Lack of bike access to light rail and bike accessibility in and around the Entertainment District and the City



*Top: Boundaries of the Entertainment District, whose original vision was never realized.
Bottom: The panel's vision for a revamped entertainment district built around connections, public places, and green space.*

III. Major Findings

The panel drew its findings by reviewing the advance packet, touring the Entertainment District, and interviewing stakeholders.

- The Entertainment District is the most economically underperforming and visually (if not technically) blighted commercial area of Lone Tree
- The Entertainment District brand is meaningless to most people
- Lone Tree's growing, well-educated and sophisticated population would support a more sophisticated urban environment including walkable streets and more high-quality restaurants at this location
- Current zoning encourages the design of buildings in isolated "islands" surrounded by a sea of parking, rather than buildings that relate to each other in an appealing and walkable streetscape.
- Weak architectural and landscape controls and guidelines in the Entertainment District contributes to the lack of sense of place
- The District lacks amenities of placemaking from the most basic (park benches) to the most developed (shade trees, parks, open space connections)
- Public safety concerns include poor lighting, lack of safe sidewalks or bikeways, and wide, fast roads that act as barriers between destinations
- The Entertainment District possesses strong pockets of vitality including thriving restaurants and food services and a growing medical sector.
- Yet the District's economic vitality is fragile. Two buildings are vacant and two buildings have vacant tenant spaces. Key leases will expire in the next few years
- Park Meadows Mall is both an asset and a liability. The Mall attracts millions of visitors and many drive right by the Entertainment District. However few know the district exists. It would be difficult to attract additional retail to the district as many business that might do well already exist at the mall



Dick Farley makes a point to fellow panelists David Starnes and John Shaw



City officials present to the ULI panel

IV. Questions for the Panel

With Panel Responses and Recommendations Summarized:

Before the TAP, the City posed the following questions to the panel:

1. Should the concept of an Entertainment District be maintained and if so what needs to be done to make it successful?

The short answer: No. The Entertainment District has almost no visibility or name recognition even among residents and zero among visitors to Park Meadows Mall.

2. If not, should the Entertainment District become something else? If so, what?

Yes. The Entertainment District can be reinvented as a neighborhood or district based on a combination of current assets: restaurants, retail, medical, office, residential, lodging, entertainment, with more multifamily housing mixed in. Placemaking elements are critical to pulling this all together: consistent signs and landscaping, wayfinding, public spaces for adults and children. These should not be “bolt on” features but integrated into a complete environment that is more attractive, green, shaded, and friendly to pedestrians, cyclists and transit.

3. Should the City take a proactive approach and if so, what is the appropriate role of the City?

Yes. City leadership is critical. Business and property owner efforts to lead for change have fractured and proved ineffective. This is a long-term project that needs both a consistent vision and a champion to see it through. In the short run, the city can be proactive by meeting with the managers of the movie theaters to determine their interest in staying and to offer encouragement for them to make improvements and stay as an anchor.



The panel cited examples of placemaking from Colorado and elsewhere. Walkability, water, shade, public art and an up-to-date cinema are seen as key to attracting new business and social vitality to the Entertainment District

The City can also zone creatively to allow for greater density and intensity of use—two keys to creating a “people magnet.” City leadership can result in a new parking strategy to allow for shared parking between uses (daytime uses for medical matched to nighttime for dinner and theater is a great example), thus cutting down on the total amount of parking provided and freeing up ground for new development. Finally the city can assist property owners to help move awkward property lines that make it more challenging to provide shared parking.

4. What kind of public investments should the City make, if any?

- Business retention and attraction
- Aesthetic improvements such as signage, branding, landscaping, promenade
- Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements and connections.
- Public gathering places such as plazas, public art, enticing pathways, parks
- Park Meadows Drive needs “traffic calming” to ensure a comfortable, safe, and inviting pedestrian environment within the district.
- Work with RTD to create a bus shuttle along Park Meadows Drive that leads to light rail. This can be “branded” with attractive shelters.

5. What kind of institutional mechanisms should be set up?

- The city should use allocated funds (\$500,000 in 2013) to seed initial investment
- The Business Improvement District (BID) must be revived with all property owners buying in
- A Metropolitan District can be formed to fund and manage public amenities (sidewalks, paths, parks, plazas)
- Pledge city admissions tax revenue back to the area
- Rezone to encourage density, more mixed-use (including multifamily) and including zoning forms that are more “urban” in the best sense: encouraging new buildings to relate to each other and to the street
- Complete citywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan; the district needs its own specific plan as well.
- Institute strong architectural, landscape and urban design controls advised by a professional design review panel

6. What are the key elements of the City’s strategic plan, if any?

- City senior leadership should meet with Regal Cinemas and theater property owner
- Produce vision in partnership with property owners
- Share vision with community
- Hire public/private finance expert to counsel city on strategy to finance improvements and city participation
- Rename, brand and market the area

V. Key Comments

With list of Stakeholder Interviews :

"The Entertainment District needs the movie theater. Without the theater, it's just a food court."

—Property owner

"We have 100 restaurants [in Lone Tree] but not one you would call upscale."

—Public official

"Lone Tree still needs to define the emotional core of the community and who you are."

—ULI Panelist

"I would market this as a new dawn and a new day in the district. Right now the place has a bad reputation among potential tenants."

—ULI panelist

"We need better and consistent lighting, maybe flags and banners like Denver Design Center. We need more development around theater. If we lose theater it will be a problem, a dark hole... if we planted the streets nicely people might not have to go to the Botanic Gardens."

—Property owner

"I grew up in a small town and lived in Santa Fe and I miss having a community gathering spot. There's no one spot to gather, there is no heartbeat. I wouldn't hop on my bike to go to these places with my kids. One thing is traffic and the other is distance."

—Lone Tree resident

"There's great open space here. You've got light rail within walking distance but you can't walk there."

—ULI panelist

"My business does well, but we have too much asphalt and underused buildings."

"A hotel operator tells me his guests almost get killed crossing Park Meadows Drive."

"Lone Tree lacks a place with a holiday focus. Maybe we could build an amphitheater where high school bands and choirs could play on weekends."

—Business owner

"The city could significantly help the property owners through some creative zoning to allow for more density on some parcels and the sharing of parking between uses like the theater and some food uses that don't primarily rely on dinner sales, and assistance in moving property lines to better align parking needs with property boundaries."

—ULI panelist

"People here are willing to spend. The average monthly family budget for entertainment is \$600. An out of the box idea might be adult gaming, something like ping pong with great food."

—Property owner

"Urban concepts will work in the suburbs. Snooze came to Southglenn but it took three years to get them."

—ULI panelist

"The amorphous nature of the built environment needs landmarks to create guideposts. The cinema marquee should be extended much higher like a lighted spire so you can see it from Park Meadows Drive. The Sky Diving building is a landmark, and might also be lighted."

—ULI panelist

"The Entertainment District is not a complete failure, but this place lacks streetscapes and is really a bar district, not entertainment."

—Property manager

"Move the Council Chambers to the current City offices and keep the presence of the City in this area."

—ULI panelist

"People who live here are educated and have lived in big cities and around the world. They are sophisticated and would respond to a more sophisticated urban environment."

—Lone Tree resident

"Snazzy bus stops would give the area a special quality and serve the mixed use nature of the district. Don't people want a relief from the car once in awhile?"

—ULI panelist

"You've got nothing to sell except compelling demographics. You need clarity of vision and then communicate that story."

—ULI panelist

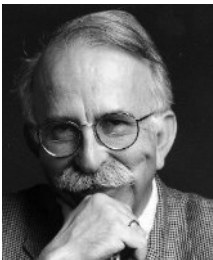
Stakeholder Interviews

- **Bob Burke**, Managing Partner, Indoor Skydiving
- **John P. Cotton**, Director of Public Works, City of Lone Tree
- **Gary Godden**, Planning Commissioner and resident, Lone Tree
- **Jim Gunning**, Mayor of Lone Tree
- **Seth Hoffman**, Deputy City Manager, City of Lone Tree
- **Hemal Jhaveri**, Chairman, SofTec Solutions and Owner of Treo building
- **Pamela J. Kelly**, Senior General Manager, Park Meadows
- **Douglas Lundstrom**, Owner, Brewery Bar III
- **Ken Marsh**, Owner of Bridge Centers (*proposing acquisition of vacant restaurant building directly south of Fox and Hound*)
- **David Smith**, President, Go Putt!
- **Dan Strammiello**, Westbrook Development Partners, Inc.
- **Julie Britti**, Lone Tree resident

VI. Panelist Bios



John M. Shaw, President, McWhinney. (*panel chair*). John oversees McWhinney's portfolio of commercial, community development, and acquisitions. Before joining in 2009, he led the Opus Denver and Kansas City offices and was key to developing 20 million + square feet of commercial properties in the western US. From 1995, the Denver office completed 7 million + square feet of commercial properties. John was also Senior VP of the Denver Tech Center. He managed land planning, zoning, development, architectural control, marketing and sales for this nationally recognized 750-acre mixed-use business park and the 1,150-acre Meridian International Business Center.



Dick Farley, FAIA, Richard Farley Urban Design. Dick has over 40 years of urban design and architectural experiences. He has been a principal of Civitas, Inc., and was deputy director of Community Planning and Design for Denver. Specialties include urban design, master planning, design standards and guidelines, streetscape design, entitlements.



Emily Gloeckner, Associate, Fehr & Peers, Denver. Emily is a registered Professional Engineer in Colorado with 15+ years experience. She has worked on the design of bicycle, pedestrian connections and routes, roadway design, signing and striping, signal systems, traffic operational analysis, and traffic forecasting. Before Fehr & Peers, she spent six years with Denver Public Works. She has a civil engineering degree from San Diego State.



David J. Goldberg, Principal, Alberta Development Partners, LLC. Mr. Goldberg has developed 8 million + square feet of retail, office and industrial space. Previously Mr. Goldberg was VP for Shea Properties in Colorado, where he developed retail projects including Highlands Ranch Town Center. The Denver native graduated from Penn with degrees in entrepreneurial management and U.S. History.



Steve Markey, Vice President, CB Richard Ellis. Steve has 14+ years in Colorado retail, working on development, tenant representation, and land sales. He represents Stir Crazy Fresh Asian Grill, Caribou Coffee and Gold's Gym; and has represented Sunflower Market and Lowe's. He advises clients on retail and mixed-use development. Steve served on CBRE's national Retail Advisory Council and is a member of the Retail Development Group. He is a graduate of the Indiana University Law School.



David Starnes, Redevelopment Manager, City of Longmont. David's job entails attracting new private investment to aging areas including Twin Peaks Mall. Previously he was VP of BBP & Associates LLC, a national real estate advisory firm specializing in urban redevelopment and public/private partnerships. BBP LLC facilitated development of \$8B + in development in 47 states and five countries.



John Ward, Managing Principal, 505 Design. John is a registered architect with decades of experience orchestrating concepts, brand positioning, programming, and coordination for national and international projects. Retail clients include Alberta Development, General Growth Properties, Lowe Enterprises, Macerich, The Mills Corp., Taubman, and Westcor.

IX. Acknowledgements

ULI Colorado thanks:

Steve Hebert, Jennifer Drybread and Lone Tree staff

Lone Tree City Council

Our panelists **Dick Farley, Emily Gloeckner, David Goldberg, Steve Markey, John Shaw, David Starnes, and John Ward.**

ULI Colorado TAPs co-chairs **Alan Colussy** and **Arleen Taniwaki**, who put endless hours and expertise into producing at least four TAPs a year.

Thank you to RTD for providing transportation for the Entertainment District tour



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