



Dare to Dream:

West Colfax Charts a Course for 2040

By William P. Marino

What do you want your world to look like in 2040? Think about it. How would you forge a path for the next generation? What about the unknowns?

Talking about unknowns! Five years ago “novel coronavirus” or “COVID-19” were not household words. Clearly, this global pandemic has and will impact our path forward. More on that later.

In 2014, when a collection of engaged citizens convened to chart a course for the next 25 years for Lakewood’s storied West Colfax corridor, they faced many unknowns. The collaboration among 60+ local civic, business, and neighborhood leaders and the City of Lakewood was both practical and bold: the group first identified known critical issues impacting the corridor, and then next ... dared to dream—and dream big! And in little more than a year the West Colfax Vision 2040 Action Plan was born.

“Lakewood Legacy Trees,” an iconic public art installation by Lonnie Hanzon, adorns RTD’s W Line stop at the Lamar Street Station along the 40 West ArtLine. Photo: William Marino

The timing was right. The community was beginning to coalesce around a series of meaningful milestones: the formation of new business improvement district (2011), the insights and adoption of the catalytic 40 West Arts Urban Design and Mobility Concepts (2012), the long-awaited opening of RTD's W Line Light Rail (2013), the two blockbuster announcements that FirstBank and Terumo BCT both would build new headquarters—collectively amounting to more than \$200+ million in new construction in the corridor, and the elation of 40 West Arts earning the status as a state-certified creative district (2014)—at the time only the 10th such designation in Colorado.

Lakewood's mayor at the time, Bob Murphy saw this as a convergence of opportunities for the city's oldest commercial corridor: "With the impact of light rail, the fresh creative energy from 40 West Arts and Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design and the quirky history that makes Colfax cool, West Colfax is poised to be the next big thing."

The group tapped Lakewood City Council member and a longtime West Colfax corridor resident Cindy Baroway as its chairperson. "West Colfax is more than a street," said Baroway. "People live here, they work here, they make memories here, and they love it here. West Colfax is a community!"

But the West Colfax community, with its "quirky" 150-year history embodied within the whole Colfax lore, needed a shared vision to rally behind—and a plan to capture and share it. Baroway and her supporting cast of stakeholders—neighborhood, business, and civic leaders—set out on a journey to create it. Baroway was supported by Roger Wadnal from City of Lakewood's Comprehensive Planning and Research Division, and two co-chairs Kevin Yoshida and me, who complemented Baroway's leadership with extensive experience in

land use, design, and history of the West Colfax corridor. Under Baroway's leadership, a cohesive core group was assembled and collaborated with scores of locals who took part in the many work sessions that resulted in the plan's formation.

"The plan had two central objectives," explained Yoshida, an architect, urban designer, and founder of IDEATE Design. "It was not only intended to function as a framework to codify and advance the unifying community vision, but also to demonstrate to those looking to invest on West Colfax that we were well organized and could rally around projects aligned with our vision."

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The Vision Group had an aggressive schedule. They met as a core group twice a month and also assembled into smaller cadres with additional community members and subject area experts, at times meeting weekly. Their early objective was clear: to gather input, identify key focus areas, and consider community priorities. They forged ahead. They kept dreaming.



The Vision Group identified six key sections for the plan: Cultural Identity (history), Infrastructure, Connectivity (transportation), Placemaking, Vibrancy (economic development) and Celebrate Colfax (marketing).



Inspired by the potential of 40 West Arts District, new owners of this apartment community on the ArtLine invested in a team of artists led by Katy Casper to transform the buildings into works of art. Photo: Kathryn Zeigler

In fact, in addition to the pragmatic approach of identifying goals and action items related to the focus areas, the 2040 Plan integrated elements of storytelling, including numerous visuals, revealing sidebars, and illuminating "What if" lists that enumerated dreams for the future.

Not so surprisingly, the group attracted experienced investors whose vision aligned with similar dreams. Case in point: Enter Bethesda-based Broad Street Realty, a national commercial real estate firm looking to establish and grow a presence in the Colorado market. The principals at the firm recognized "the convergence of opportunities" brought together by a forward-thinking city and a well-organized local community—a community with vision.

"We were immediately drawn to this opportunity," said Tom Yockey, a founder and director of Broad Street Realty that owns and manages 18 shopping centers in five states. "We recognized its potential. It was well located just minutes from downtown, with easy access to I-70 and the mountains, and there was clear evidence of public investment with the opening of light rail—with five stations in this corridor. And the community had established neighborhood organizations and an active business improvement district that worked closely with the city," Yockey added, "and they all were actively rallying support for the emerging arts district."

Yockey joined the Vision Group and contributed to the completion of the Vision

2040 Plan. His firm invested more than \$18 million in purchasing and improving the old 1950-vintage JCRS Shopping Center, renamed to Lamar Station Plaza, transforming it into an important commercial and entertainment hub on West Colfax.

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Yockey was not the only visionary who resonated with the overarching goals the group formulated.

The National Endowment for the Arts recognized the merits of one of the “what ifs” in the plan—“the community’s idea for an arts loop (now called the ArtLine), a distinctive way to provide a walking and bicycling arts experience around 40 West Arts District, received national support with a \$100,000 OurTown grant, the largest amount awarded under the program,” reported a May 2016 city press release that announced the prestigious grant award.

Jeff and Jamie Temple, bothers who run Momentum Development, built West Line Flats, a five-story, 155-unit luxury rental property located 400 feet from the Lamar Station on the W Line light rail—the first full market rate development of this scale in the corridor in more than 20 years.

Scott Watkins of T.O.D Properties and Doug Elenowitz of Trailbreak Partners spearheaded the multi-phased development of 190 townhomes and modern rental apartments also on the W Line, a short walk to Sheridan station—that’s been well received by the market as it is moving forward with its fifth phase.

Reid Davis, CEO of Riverpoint Partners, is the visionary behind two projects on Lamar



ABOVE: West Line Village funded a stunning wall mural by Michelle Wolins entitled “Our Roots Give Us Wings” that celebrates the history of the community. Photo: Kathryn Zeigler

BELOW: The developer of West Line Flats selected Italian artist Giuseppe Percivati’s mural concept called “The Lakewood Lion” for its new TOD community along the W Line. Photo: William Marino



Street, one new construction and the another a renovation project. The new development, Brickhouse at Lamar Station, is a four-story, 290-unit luxury multifamily property at the corner of W. 13th Avenue and the W Line’s station at Lamar Street. The renovation of 1960-vintage Lamar Station Apartments (hint to readers—it’s getting a new name soon!) includes upgrades to all 138 units and a major, six-figure investment in public art. The property, located on the 40 West ArtLine—which currently includes 70+ art installations along its four-mile walking and biking route, is adding to that total by funding a series of large murals by artist Katy Casper and her team. “This significant investment in murals benefits our residents as well as those who enjoy 40 West’s ArtLine,” said Davis. “We’ve been watching the West Colfax area evolve. Because of the vision, the progress, and

the potential here, we’ve made substantial investments in the corridor during the past three years.”

In little more than a year, the Vision Group landed on a plan that worked. It wasn’t perfect. There were many unanswered questions. But the document represented the collective efforts of a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The group dedicated time, expertise, and passion for West Colfax to support the evolution of this historic corridor in such a way that aligns with the vision and values of the community. The overarching goal was to shape West Colfax into a place where locals and visitors alike come to create fresh opportunities, connect with diverse experiences, and celebrate culture both old and new.

The plan is working. Its structure achieves both objectives: practical enough to categorize the many key needs in the corridor and visionary enough to show potential investors that this is a community that can work together, dream big, and get things done.

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“[The plan] worked because it’s aspirational. It paints a picture of a community striving to shape its future,” said Mayor Adam Paul, a strong advocate for West Colfax when he was a city council member, and he continues his support as mayor.



While the aforementioned examples highlight recent successes, there is still so much to do.

When we embarked on this project more than five years ago—a global pandemic was the stuff of a Stephen King novel. (See *The Stand*—by King, published by Doubleday, 1978.) While our world struggles with profound upheavals in public health, in the economy, and in social justice and equity for all people, we gather to assess the progress in the five years since the West Colfax Vision 2040 Action Plan was adopted. Who would have fathomed the strange world in which we now live—and likely, these effects will have impact long after this article goes to press.

But we cannot be stymied. We know there is more work to do. While we have much to celebrate from the last five years, all six categories of the current plan have unmet goals and unfulfilled dreams—from critical flood plain improvements that will spur re-development to streetscape upgrades

The new Vision 2040 Action Plan was built on a solid foundation—the first-ever West Colfax Action Plan adopted in 2006. It was this plan that recommended the formation of a business improvement district and first envisioned an arts district along West Colfax.

that will improve pedestrian safety and add to the aesthetics of our placemaking efforts. The corridor still needs more sidewalks, more lighting, and more new businesses to fill empty spaces and add to the vibrancy here, while we advocate for further investment in the ArtLine to improve this vital amenity that serves as an economic development attribute and a recreational and cultural feature for residents and visitors. Over the next year, some of the original group will join with newcomers to review the West Colfax Vision 2040 Action Plan to report on its status, make course corrections, and continue the momentum.

How do we make sure the next five years are better ... how do we continue the forward motion ... how do we stay focused on delivering results for our community? Same fundamental principles: we’ll do it with heart, and we’ll do it together. All are welcome in the spirit of community and collaboration.

Together, we identify opportunities; together, we collaborate to find resources; together, we roll up our sleeves and work—and then, together, we celebrate the successes, small and large, along the way.

And in this spirit—we promise to keep asking “what if” and to always, always dream big. It’s no failure to fall short of a big dream—but certainly we will not achieve great things if we don’t first think it’s possible.

Our mantra is our solution: collaborate and keep dreaming!

William Marino is chief executive of the Lakewood-W. Colfax BID and the board chair of 40 West Arts District.



Former city council member and WCCA board member Cindy Baroway meets with BID Board President Kevin Yoshida to plan the community review of the West Colfax Vision 2040 Action Plan. Photo: William Marino



A bike tour of the 40 West ArtLine starts at Mountair Park signature art installation “Dermal Plate Gateway” by PUNCH. Photo: Jamie Perkins



Artist Katy Casper created a playful ArtLine sidewalk mural “Harvest Labyrinth” along the W Line’s bike path. Photo: Will Strathmann

A “What If” in the Works: A Shoppable Motel + Neighborhood Destination

What if 40 West Arts converted a historic motel into an arts-centric boutique motor inn? This ‘What if’ written into the West Colfax Vision 2040 Action Plan now has the potential of becoming a reality.

Nearly five years ago, Denver’s Lauren Richardson was living and working for an agency in San Francisco. She was traveling frequently to design and produce events and tradeshows across the country and, preferring to stay in Airbnbs over hotels, she got an idea...

On one particular trip to Chicago, Lauren really wanted the coffee table book in the space she was staying. It wasn’t necessarily one-of-a-kind, but she loved that it reminded her of the fond memories she had visiting the city. She wound up leaving with the book, and to this day it sits on her desk as the first little ‘sursy’ that started it all.

A ‘sursy’ is a southern term for a souvenir - a gift or trinket to remember your trip by. Richardson named her company ‘The Sursy’ as a subtle nod to her North Carolina roots and to literally describe the innovative ‘shoppable stay’ experience she’s building her multi-faceted business around.

Today, The Sursy is an experiential design and development group that offers interior

design and listing optimization services to short term rental homeowners, curates an online home goods shop, operates a growing portfolio of shoppable Airbnbs, and is developing a unique hospitality concept that’s coming soon to West Colfax.

The vision for The Sursy’s first commercial project is to fuse retail, hospitality, and design to create a neighborhood destination that brings locals and travelers together and supports local makers. The core mission is to build a concept that encourages community and also supports the community. “By not only promoting artists and creatives through our shoppable spaces and curated e-shop but in also hiring them as a part of our design and development projects, we keep a localized focus on business operations and experience in a way that’s never been done before,” Richardson says.

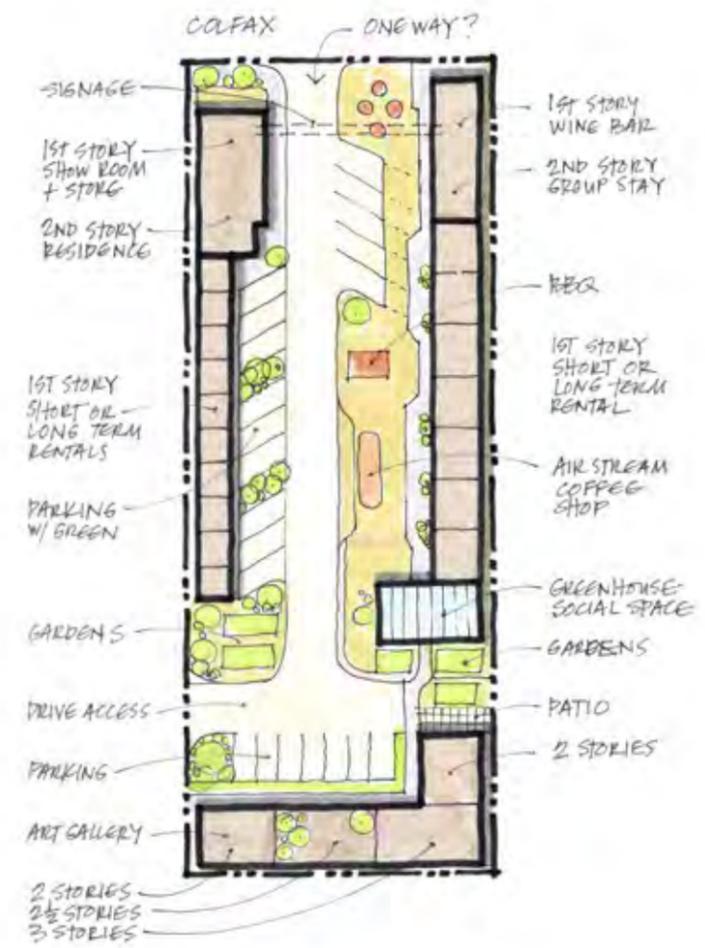
The White Swan Motel at 6060 West Colfax is currently operational, but in need of a reimagining to restore it to its glory days and make it a ‘must visit’ for travelers and Coloradans alike. The existing mid-century structure will be redeveloped to make way for what will become a mixed-use property with shoppable rooms that will host short-term and extended stay guests and be filled with locally made furnishings, art, and décor that are all for sale. There are also plans for

several commercial spaces that will become amenities for travelers and locals as well as a retail store, design offices, a non-profit art gallery, a functional greenhouse and event venue, and rent-controlled units intended to support an artist-in-residence program.

How will it all fit? “Creatively and thoughtfully,” Richardson says. “In this new world forming amidst a global pandemic, the way people travel and spend their money is changing in front of our eyes. Without realizing it, the concept for The Sursy is an answer to how - I think - the future of hospitality and retail will need to evolve to meet the needs of the modern traveler and consumer. I predict the staycation trend is here to stay, that working vacations will be sought after and invested in, and that people will be spending money to shop small and curate their surroundings more now than ever.”

About the Founder

Lauren Richardson is a multidisciplinary creative and entrepreneur living in Denver. Prior to founding The Sursy, she spent years working for Fortune500 brands at an experiential agency. She is a self-proclaimed maximalist, who is obsessed with innovation in real estate and interiors and passionate about creating meaningful, localized experiences that support the community.



By architect Nicole Delmage of ShelterBelt Design



The White Swan Court, a classic mid-century motor inn, opened in 1945.



Richardson found a vintage postcard of the White Swan, located at 6060 West Colfax Avenue.