

Greater Park Hill News

Holly Area Update

By Arthur Rosenblum

Since the arson fire that destroyed the blighted Holly Shopping Center in spring 2008, community members have been meeting frequently and with a rarely seen commitment to ensure that responsible, community-building development takes place at the Holly and that the area again become a source of pride for neighbors. The Holly is located between Hudson and Holly Streets and 33rd and 35th Avenues in Northeast Park Hill.

Civic and government leaders and foundations have supported the effort, at once absorbing and reinforcing the energy of the residents. In spring 2009, in the midst of one of the nation's worst economic downturns, the nonprofit group, Urban Land Conservancy (ULC), purchased the site of the old center and committed to seeking development partners who place civic responsibility above strictly bottom line motives.



Rigoberta Menchú greeting a child at the Holly

Community Vision

Shortly after the purchase, ULC engaged the consulting firm of community by design (cbd) to head up a “visioning” process to determine how the community hopes to see the former shopping center and its nearby streets developed. At a meeting in late June, cbd principals Ray Kramer and Jann Oldham presented a draft of their report. The draft can be viewed on cbd’s website, www.communitybydesgn.com (no “i” in desgn!). Kramer and Oldham captured the community’s vision in the report and emphasized the “support for (uses) aligned with recognizable public benefits, (including but not limited to educational, training, civic/institutional, heritage, events, etc.).”

The development vision preferred by the community (Concept D), “uses a campus approach” and has a large central plaza anchoring the site, incorporates space for a playground and community garden, buildings for the uses listed above, and limited retail uses. The concept also addresses development potential for surrounding areas including the Hope Center and the Hiawatha Davis Recreation Center.

Essential to the vision is the adherence to Good Neighbor Principles that should guide the development and the selection of development partners. These include: Partnership and Collaboration; Quality of Life; Public Realm; Compatibility and Sustainability.

Following a public comment period, ULC, the Holly Area Redevelopment Project (HARP) committee members and cbd will develop strategies to obtain partners and developers who will invest in development while honoring the area’s history and the values described by the community.

Blessing the Land

On Monday, July 12, neighborhood youth and other volunteers undertook a Holly cleanup and collected dozens of bags of trash in an effort to make sure the Holly never again becomes an area of blight that attracts crime.

The highlight of the day was the appearance of 1992 Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú who has dedicated her life to fighting for human rights in her native Guatemala and elsewhere. Ms. Menchú was in Denver for annual Peace Jam programs and as a participant in the Biennial for the Americas.

Terrance Roberts, of the Prodigal Son Initiative and one of the organizers of the event, opened the ceremony and commented about the history of gang activity in the area and his goal “to put ourselves out of business,” by no longer needing efforts to divert youth from gangs.

In his welcoming remarks, State Senator Mike Johnston spoke of the parallel between the regeneration of the land that follows forest fires and the potential for regeneration of the Holly following its fire.

Councilwoman Carla Madison, obviously moved by the presence of Menchú, spoke of her hope to “manifest the peace inside of us into the world.”

Brother Jeff Fard introduced Ms. Menchú, telling her “You are who we’ve been waiting for. Our prayers are answered by your presence here.” Pointing to the water to be used in the ceremonial blessing, Brother Jeff remarked, “Water is the friend of everything living.”

Following the ceremony, Ms. Menchú addressed the gathering, mostly youth, and encouraged them to “Ask forgiveness of Mother Earth for the times we didn’t take care,” and she asked them to promise that everything done at the Holly will be to promote life. She shared her wish for the children growing up and to be in solidarity with all people. She explained that if people learn to balance the three major elements of life, the material, the social and the spiritual, there would no

longer be a need for violence.

Peace Mural

As part of the ongoing effort to actively demonstrate the community's commitment to a safe and vital Holly area, funds are being raised to create the Holly Square Peace Mural covering 22,000 square feet of the former shopping center's site. Managed by the Prodigal Son Initiative, the mural will contain a wide range of peace-oriented images created by professional muralists based on input from community stakeholders, especially youth.

More than \$20,000 of the \$30,000 budget for the project has been raised. Work is expected to begin in mid-September and should be completed in only four or five days. Kroenke Sports Enterprises, owners of the Denver Nuggets, will donate one of the two basketball courts to built on the site. The other will be funded by Denver's Parks & Recreation Department. In early October, the Nuggets will sponsor and attend a ceremony introducing the mural to the community. The twelve concrete pillars that still occupy the site will be painted, and the phrase "Peace on Earth" will be written in twelve different languages on them.

Creation of the mural is being undertaken with the full understanding that as soon as development takes place most or all of the mural will be destroyed or covered. Creating the mural under these conditions is further evidence of the community's passion for embodying the peaceful blessings and wishes that were made upon this site.