



**Parsons Brinckerhoff**  
555 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 500  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
303-832-9091  
Fax: 303-728-1936

**Date:** October 28, 2008

**To:** Gideon Berger, Senior Planner  
Community Planning and Development, City and County of Denver

**From:** Laura Aldrete, Senior Supervising Planner  
PB PlaceMaking

**Re:** Elyria Swansea Small Area Plan Overview

---

The Elyria Swansea neighborhoods are characterized by a co-existence of residential and industrial uses adjacent to one another with a series of barriers transecting the neighborhoods. These barriers include Interstate-70, Union Pacific (UP) and Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail lines and leads, and the South Platte River. With the adjacency of residential to industrial and heavy industrial, the neighborhoods have experienced a number of Environmental Justice issues as well. The precedence for this planning effort, in part, comes from a multitude of potential changes to the physical environment, creating new opportunities for the neighborhoods to re-envision themselves and leverage significant public improvements for the benefit of the community. The neighborhoods will benefit from three new commuter rail stations as a part of the FasTracks System, and the potential relocation of I-70, which currently bisects and disconnects the original, historic neighborhoods. With these potential public improvements, community redevelopment opportunities are likely to follow.

The urban planning and design consulting firm of PB PlaceMaking was asked to assist the City and County of Denver (Denver) in facilitating a community charrette and producing a number of products that will build the basis of the Small Area Plan. The Small Area Plan comes at an important time when significant planning is occurring on commuter rail alignments and stations, potential relocation of the I-70 viaduct (as per the I-70 EIS), and potential significant redevelopment opportunities of both the South Platte River and large land parcels including the National Western Stock Show and Denver Coliseum. As a part of this process several assumptions have been made in order to progress the planning effort and include:

- I-70 would relocate and 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue would be re-instated into the street network as an arterial road
- All existing rail lines and leads would continue in their current locations
- The National Western Stock Show may continue in its current location or choose to relocate, but regardless, significant redevelopment of the site would occur.
- The South Platte River, currently undergoing a Parks Planning exercise, would be rehabilitated to continue the efforts that have occurred to the south in the Platte Valley adjacent to LODO.
- The historic co-existence of residential and industrial uses is desired as part of the future of these neighborhoods.



PB PlaceMaking produced seven products, described herein, for Denver as the basis for the Small Area Plan:

- Elyria Swansea Neighborhood Framework Plan
- Elyria Swansea Conceptual Neighborhood Land Use Plan
- Colorado Station Area Circulation Plan
- 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue Cross-section
- 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue Sketch-up Renderings (2)
- Grocery Store Market Analysis (conducted by ArLand Land Use Economics)
- Elyria Swansea Truck Route Opportunities

### **Elyria Swansea Framework Plan**

Through the community charrette and internal Denver work-session with City staff, several core issues surfaced as the fundamental organizing elements to the neighborhood plan. These elements are represented in the Framework Plan and described below:

#### **1. The South Platte River as a Focal Point**

Denver has begun to rethink its connection to its natural context starting with the Platte River redevelopment adjacent to the neighborhoods. Historically, the river has been treated as a back alley, where waste and other noxious undesirables were deposited. The river physically serves as an organizing element to the City, seaming edges of neighborhoods together and connecting the City east to west. It serves as public park space for neighbors to gather and enjoy a sinuous natural greenway with discovery of smaller developed parks along the river.

#### **2. Leverage Public Improvements to Realize the Neighborhood Vision**

Elyria Swansea may be the only neighborhood in Denver receiving this many transit stations in its neighborhood. Both the North Metro Commuter Rail Corridor and the East Corridor will run through Elyria Swansea. The National Western Stock Show (NWSS) Station will be located on the North Metro corridor and the 38<sup>th</sup>/Blake and Colorado stations will be located on the East Corridor. Each station can play a different role in how it serves the community and interacts with the regional corridors that it will become a part of. Stations provide an opportunity for connections for the community to reach work, school and play as well as to connect with other modes of transportation, such as buses. The increase in activity to the station allows for development opportunities called Transit Oriented Development (TOD). TOD may be described by four basic principles, which define the essential characteristics of all successful TODs: greater density than community average, a mix of uses, quality pedestrian environment, and a defined center.

#### **3. Create Community Nodes**

Places where neighbors can address everyday needs as well as come together as a community for special events are important building blocks to community building. These community nodes provide services to the community, such as grocery stores and other businesses that are needed for everyday life. Safe pedestrian, transit and automobile access to these nodes are important for their success as well their



integration into the community. These community nodes also support civic uses such as a post office, library, and other governmental services. Three nodes are located at the transit stations that will be introduced into the neighborhoods (described above) with the build-out of the FasTracks system. These new stations allow for opportunities for new residential types, a mix of uses including services for the community and enhanced pedestrian connections. The relocation of the I-70 and Vasquez Boulevard interchange provide a redevelopment opportunity at 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Vasquez due to excess right-of-way and potential relocation of commercial uses dependent on proximity to highway interchanges. This community node also serves to knit together the north and south sides of the neighborhood that have been disconnected as a result of the highway.

#### **4. Reconnect the Neighborhoods north to south**

With the relocation of I-70 (assumed for these planning purposes), the neighborhoods can re-connect the southern portion with the northern portion of the neighborhood. Since I-70 was constructed in the late 1950's, these neighborhoods have been separated by major elevated highway infrastructure. The removal of this structure can help to reconnect the neighborhood and create a new character for 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the area. Noise and air pollution resulting from the highway activity that bisects the communities have been issues of concern for the community. Additionally, the highway's cut through the traditional Denver street grid and neighborhoods has created un-used, low-visibility spaces that feel uncomfortable and are unsafe.

#### **5. Balance Industrial and Residential Uses**

Historically, the Elyria Swansea neighborhoods have existed with residential and industrial uses in close proximity to each other. The neighborhoods have developed a unique character that distinguishes them from other Denver neighborhoods. However, for the neighborhoods to thrive, a balance between these land uses is needed. It is a balance that supports pedestrian connections through the neighborhoods and begins to create better defined areas for industrial and residential.

#### **Elyria Swansea Land Use Concept Plan**

The land use concept plan further defines specific shifts in land use from the existing land uses and specific connections to the river and across rail line barriers. Community gathering places around transit stations and redevelopment opportunities provide walkable access to goods and services. The various components of the Land Use Concept Plan are defined below:

**Industrial:** Industrial uses within the neighborhood are important to the larger city economy and the neighborhood (employment). However, there are many areas in the neighborhood where industrial and residential overlap or conflict with each other. In the plan, industrial uses are preserved, and are supported by creating more contiguous industrial areas. Defined boundaries and buffers are needed to protect the residential neighborhood character while maintaining the operational and functional needs of the industrial. An I-70 realignment would shift the locations of interchanges and access into the neighborhood, including truck routes. The new I-70 interchanges would be located at York, Brighton Boulevard, Colorado and Vasquez. Industrial uses would utilize these access points. Trucks would also continue to use 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which would become a boulevard following the relocation of I-70.



**Mixed Use:** three nodes of mixed use have been defined as part of this plan. The three nodes include the National Western Stock Show (NWSS)/North Metro rail station, the 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Steele Street intersection, and the East Corridor Colorado Station at 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

NWSS/North Metro Station: One of two locations identified for the North Metro rail station is at the NWSS along the rail corridor. The future of the NWSS (whether it would stay or relocate) is unknown. However, with the introduction of the rail station within the NWSS property, new pedestrian, bus and automobile connections will need to be made, regardless of whether or not NWSS stays in its current location or the site is redeveloped. A redevelopment opportunity would open up approximately 80 acres that may be envisioned as an Entertainment District.

46<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Steele Street: 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue is envisioned as a multi-modal boulevard that moves both local and regional traffic. Between the Brighton/I-70 interchange and Monroe Street, 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue would be a four-lane roadway with a center median. Frontage roads would parallel the boulevard to allow for access to residences and businesses and provide a buffer from the main roadway. Sidewalks would be located along the frontage roads.

Residential areas north and south of 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue will be reconnected with the realignment of I-70. The intersection at 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Steele Street would become a hub of mixed-use neighborhood activity, with retail concentrated at the intersection. This intersection would serve as a gateway to the neighborhood from the east, and would provide connections between the NWSS area and the Colorado Station.

Colorado Station: The Colorado Station is planned just north of Jackson and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets, with primary access from Colorado Boulevard at 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The station is planned in a primarily industrial area, although new multi-family residential developments have recently been completed east of Colorado Boulevard and south of 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue. A larger-scale circulation plan was completed for this station as shown in the attached figures. The plan represents an interim condition assuming the year 2018. Under this plan, I-70 remains in its current location. North of the UP railroad tracks, light industrial uses would be preserved, but with an improved street network within the site.

RTD requires 1,900 parking spaces for the station by the year 2030. Due to RTD station operation requirements, Smith Road must be realigned south of the station, as shown in the plan. The key principle to creating TOD at this station is to concentrate mixed-use on the gateway streets to the station and shift the parking away from the station. This has been accomplished through designing mixed-use on both sides of Jackson Street to activate the street and form a mixed-use corridor leading to the station platforms. Commercial mixed-use is envisioned between 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Smith Road. A Grocery Store Market Analysis identified a suitable location for an ethnic grocery store at Smith Road and Colorado Boulevard. Smaller in scale than a traditional national grocery, this would serve the Elyria Swansea and Park Hill Neighborhoods over the next 10 years; if I-70 were to be realigned, a grocery store may be feasible at 46<sup>th</sup> and Steele in the future. A pedestrian



**Parsons Brinckerhoff**  
555 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 500  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
303-832-9091  
Fax: 303-728-1936

bridge over the railroad tracks at the station platform is proposed. This bridge would connect the station to the neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks.

A fourth node adjacent to the neighborhood boundary is the 38<sup>th</sup> and Blake Station along the East Corridor. This station will have a large impact on the neighborhood since the station parking and primary redevelopment sites are located in southwest Elyria Swansea. The station location has not been solidified. However, large contiguous parcels may become opportunity sites for TOD, including the Trailer on Flat Car (TOFC) site and the light industrial properties along Brighton Boulevard.

**Low-Density Residential:** Core areas of the residential neighborhood do not change in character or density. Generations of residents have lived in the neighborhood, creating a strong cultural identity. The youth are a primary concern for residents—maintaining their health and well being, and providing safe access routes to schools and community centers such as the Swansea Elementary School, Swansea Recreation Center, the Valdez Perry Library and the Cross Community Coalition. The outreach conducted for this plan confirmed that the community itself is strong, but that the streets, alleys and homes need to be better maintained and connections to activities and facilities need improvement.

The plan will reconnect the neighborhood north-south across 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and connect east-west along designated pedestrian routes. 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a priority east-west pedestrian connection to link the node at 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Vasquez with the NWSS area, as well as the Library and smaller neighborhood parks. 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue provides a secondary linkage to connect residents directly with the NWSS station and the Globeville neighborhood to the west. North-south pedestrian linkages are identified at Clayton Street and Steele Street, and a proposed pedestrian bridge to the Colorado Station near Jackson Street.

**Medium-Density Residential:** A variety of housing types and densities are important for a neighborhood to maintain its diversity and character. Medium-density residential is envisioned along 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue to create a “Main Street” of diverse activity and street life. This land use category would include apartments and condominiums, or work/live units that provide retail or office space at ground level and residential in the floors above. The residential would connect to the retail node at 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue, creating a pedestrian active boulevard that all of the neighborhood residents can enjoy.

**Parks/Open Space:** The strategy for future parks and open space is to improve the existing spaces while enhancing the South Platte River as an amenity. The South Platte River is a hidden corridor of green relief and recreation –and with redevelopment of the green corridor could become more inviting and accessible for the surrounding community. Part of this re-discovery of the river would create better visibility, a strong identity for the neighborhood, and an opportunity to be re –woven into the neighborhood fabric. The River has a bicycle trail that connects to downtown and to neighborhoods north of Elyria Swansea.

The proposed plan incorporates recent recommendations from the *River North Greenway Master Plan* currently underway by the City and County of Denver. This plan proposes river gateways with access points such as steps/ramps to trails and the river, and amenities including benches, trash receptacles and lighting. Green space along the River would be expanded and connected to create gathering spaces and informal areas of recreation. The green space north of 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue along the River would connect with the



**Parsons Brinckerhoff**  
555 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 500  
Denver, Colorado 80202  
303-832-9091  
Fax: 303-728-1936

NWSS Entertainment District Area and could be used by the District, depending on the type of redevelopment that evolves.

The neighborhood is served by the Swansea Park, Globeville Park and smaller pocket parks. The safety and security of these parks needs to be enhanced by lessening gang and drug activity and providing centers of activity. The plan would create strong linkages between the single-family residential and the parks so that residents can take ownership and responsibility over their parks, and take pride in the parks as an extension of their culture and identity. Residents need to view the parks as inviting places rather than dangerous places, and the first step in that process is to improve their visibility and connectivity.