



The Email Express



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Park Hill resident hit by down zoning 1-2

West Washington Park down zoning key dates 2

A neighbor worth knowing 3

Snow removal plan ready for action 3

Construction begins at Prairie Park 4

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“This house is all I’ve got”



Meredith Carson's home and property in South Park Hill. A November down zoning in her neighborhood reduced her property's value by \$150,000.

Park Hill resident Meredith Carson had her retirement all planned out.

A homeowner for 32 years of the 1600 block of Albion St. – “my very small home on a very large lot,” as she puts it – Carson planned to sell her property this year, move to a less expensive home and “put some money toward my retirement.”

She had a contract with a builder who planned to put up two duplexes on the 14,000-square-foot lot, which is half a block from busy Colorado Boulevard and a block and a half from equally busy East Colfax Avenue.

Carson described the planned project “as very nice homes, consistent with the size and character of the neighborhood, plenty of green space and setback for all.”

That didn't happen because of what Carson calls “the fastest, most pointless down zoning in Denver's history.” The change was

proposed by Councilmember Carla Madison. Zoning revisions proposed by council members don't require the longer review process required of changes requested by property owners. The change took just 74 days from the date that Madison proposed it.

On Nov. 3 the Denver City Council voted to downzone 21.5 acres in south Park Hill from R-2 to R-1, including Carson's property on the edge of the area. The move to rezone was prompted by a builder's plan to erect a nine-unit development at East 16th Avenue and Cherry Street, and residents' fears that another developer would build a large project nearby.

The irony is that the rezoning approved by council exempted the nine-unit project.

Councilmember Charlie Brown tried to get an exemption for Carson's property, but only Councilmember Jeanne Faatz supported him,

(Continued on page 2)

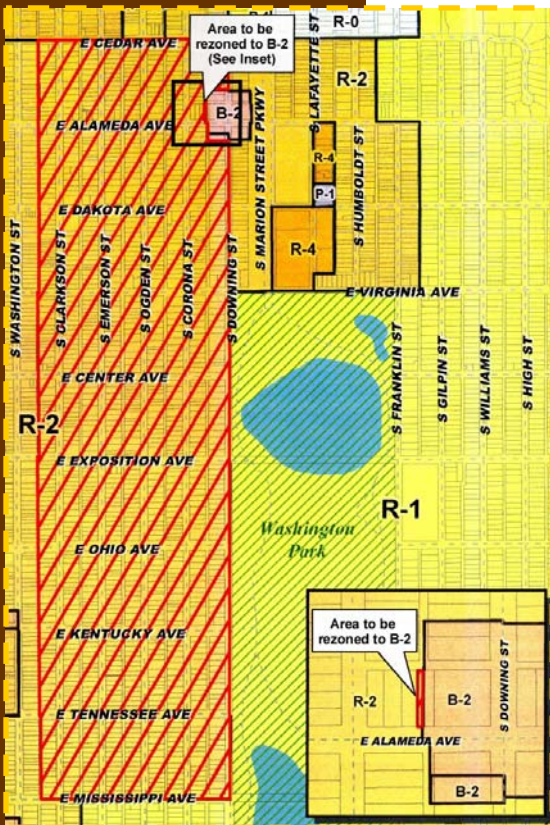
“Hostile down zonings negatively affect some individual property owners, divide neighborhoods and deny long standing, individual property rights.”

-Councilman Charlie Brown

West Wash Park down zoning key dates

Dec. 10: The City Council's Blueprint Denver committee will have a follow-up discussion regarding the proposed moratorium in West Washington Park. The meeting will be televised on Denver's Channel 8 and begins at 1:30p.m.

Dec. 15: A public hearing will be held regarding final consideration of the down zoning proposal. City Council begins at 5:30p.m. You must sign up that night to speak.



Cross-hatched overlay shows the area proposed for down zoning from R-2 to R-1.

and the other 11 members voted against an exemption for Carson.

Carson's property is still for sale, but her financial prospects are dimmed. She said her real estate agent said the down zoning has reduced the property's value by \$150,000.

As she wrote to Brown, "I'm the loser here. The developer gets to have his project, the neighbors get their way, but I am being stripped of my rights and financial security. How can this be happening? I am a responsible citizen, and I feel this is an affront to the American way of life. I am bitterly disappointed in council's decision to push forward with this pointless down zoning, which will pretty much do away with any hope I have for retirement."

The Park Hill down zoning is the second of three such changes in the city this year.

Last April 29, City Council voted 11-2 to approve two ordinances that down zoned parts of the West Highland and Sloan's

Lake neighborhoods from R-2 to R-1, limiting development on more than 100 acres to single-family homes.

That down zoning was initiated by neighborhood residents and also includes an exemption for some development in progress when the ordinance was passed.

But the two-year battle seriously divided the neighborhood, raised questions about how the city planning department handles such issues and whether it is appropriate to have major zoning changes in individual neighborhoods before a new city zoning code is adopted, probably sometime next year.

Now, a major hostile down zoning proposed in West Washington Park is raising similar controversy and questions, just as were surfaced in the Park Hill and Northwest Denver case.

The West Washington Park proposal was

made not by residents but by Councilmember Chris Nevitt of District 7, who filed the rezoning application on Oct. 9. As in Park Hill, this plan also is on a fast track – a public hearing and full council consideration is scheduled for Dec. 15, right in the middle of the holiday season.

The proposal would change the zoning from R-2 to R-1 for some 1,150 households in an area bounded by Cedar Avenue on the north, Downing Street on the east, Mississippi Avenue on the south and the alley between Clarkson and Washington on the west. (This is the area just across South Downing from Washington Park.)

At just over 200 acres, the proposed rezoning is twice the size of the Sloan's Lake change and nearly 10 times larger than the Park Hill rezoning. It is the largest proposed rezoning in the history of the city.

The goal is the same – to prevent construction of duplexes and other multi-unit buildings on lots of 6,000 square feet or more.

The risks of the down zoning are the same as in Sloan's Lake and Park Hill – restriction of property rights and creation of incentives to build large homes with the potential to drive up home prices and make the neighborhoods less diverse.

Opponents of the three down zonings have argued that design and construction guidelines are better tools for managing neighborhood development and preserving neighborhood character. They also note that voluntary, property-by-property down zoning, as has happened in parts of City Park West and Congress Park, protects neighborhoods without turning neighbors into enemies.

And, some planning experts fear down zoning will make it harder to provide affordable housing in Denver, which already is in short supply.

But, so far the city doesn't seem to be listening to those voices, or to people like Meredith Carson.

As Brown said at the November 4 City Council meeting, quoting the old Woody Guthrie song, *Pretty Boy Floyd*, "Some rob you with a six-gun, some with a fountain pen."

A neighbor worth knowing



Captain Ron Horn at Station 21 in Washington Park.

Capt. Ron Horn, 54, is the senior officer at Denver Fire Department Station 21 at the corner of Virginia and Franklin in Washington Park East. A 30-year-veteran of the DFD, he asked to be assigned to Station 21 when the previous captain retired four years ago. He spends two to three nights a week in the station house, making him a part-time resident of the neighborhood, focused on community safety.

How do you connect with the community: "We host a pancake breakfast each fall and had about 1,000 people this September."

What makes this neighborhood special: "The park. People really use it. It's busy all the time. The picnic areas are full even when it's cold outside."

The most common problem in the park: "Bike accidents. We had a half dozen or so this summer. When they have to take them off in an ambulance, we'll hold their bike here until they can come and pick it up."

When he's not supervising the station or responding to calls, Horn likes to draw cartoons, which he displays in his room at the station. He incorporates fire fighters and humorous things that happen on the job into the pictures. Horn also does the artwork each year for the aprons sold at the department's chili cook-off and other events. Proceeds benefit the Denver Fire Fighters Burn Foundation, a non-profit organization that funds scholarships, supports the Children's Hospital Burn Center, sends children to camp and provides benefits for fire victims. Learn more at denverburnfoundation.org



Captain Horn's design for this year's Annual Pancake Breakfast

Why did you want to work here: "It's a plum assignment. There's no other station in a park. We average about six to seven calls a day. We get a lot of box alarm calls (when security systems are triggered.) It's usually pretty quiet at night. I wasn't used to that, because I worked for about 10 years at 25th and Federal and we were always busy."

What might surprise people about your job: "We buy our own food and are responsible for our own meals and for doing cleaning and maintenance of the station."

Who lives in the neighborhood: "It's an active bunch, both old and young people, a lot of families. It's very family-oriented."

Denver snow removal plans ready for action

Let it snow! Denver's Street Maintenance Department is bundled up and ready for winter. The snow removal plan is reviewed and updated each year based on "lessons learned" from previous major snow emergencies like the blizzards of 2003 and 2006/2007. One major highlight in this year's Snow Removal Plan is that residential streets will *not* be plowed unless 12 or more inches of snow has fallen. For information on what equipment will be used before, during and after a snowstorm, snow routes and self-help tips go to the Street Maintenance Snow Removal page by visiting www.denvergov.org/HomePage/Home/tabid/428803/Default.aspx. Brochures are also available at Councilman Brown's office and many Denver McDonald's locations. Updates and other tips can be found on Denver's Channel 8 TV (visit denvergov.org/denver8tv for a list of programs).



Construction begins at Prairie Park

Prairie Park, the planned 14-acre reconstruction of the kind of grasslands that existed before Denver was founded, is taking shape along the Historic Buchtel Boulevard Trail between south Josephine and Monroe streets, southwest of the University of Denver campus.

The park is due to be finished in 2011 and will include an educational walk and signs identifying native plants.

Work has begun in the fox den area between south Fillmore and Milwaukee streets. The plan is for work to be done by early spring so that the foxes won't be scared away from returning to their den to have their kits. City workers are aware of the neighbors' interest in the foxes, and a lot of care is being taken with this part of the project.



Construction in Prairie Park near Buchtel Boulevard, and S. St. Paul Street. Prairie Park is scheduled to be completed in 2011.

Low berms and crushed-stone paths will be part of the design.

People driving and walking by the area probably wonder how a park will emerge from a construction site, so here's a rundown on what's going on.

All that orange fencing encloses stands of existing native grass that will be kept, and the black fencing is designed to keep dirt and debris in place. Later, the rest of the area will be plowed and sown with additional native grasses.

Some residents have asked about the white stones in the area near South Adams Street. The Parks and Recreation Department advises that the stones are temporary, placed there for work trucks to drive over as they leave areas where there is loose dirt. This helps shake the dirt off the trucks, preventing it from spreading into the street. This system is expected to be used in various locations as work progresses.

Some residents also have asked about a sign. We're told that won't be put in place until the project is completed.

- *The chair of the Parks and Open Space committee of the University Park Community Council, Diana Helper, contributed to this article.*



The site, formerly railroad right-of-way owned by RTD, became part of Denver's Parks and Recreation Department in 2004 in a land trade assisted by Councilman Brown. In 1976, with assistance from Diana Helper, it was selected for the Colorado Centennial Project. Over the years the Trail, Buchtel Centennial Park, bikeways and historic designation have been accomplished.