

Getting from Here to There

By Jim Theye, LoDo District, Inc.

Lots of the work that goes on within the LoDo District, Inc. is focused on efforts to keep long-term goals moving forward. It is rewarding to see some of our goals achieved, but it can often be fairly anti-climactic when it happens. This is fine – we are likely already working on the next round of issues when the old ones manifest themselves.

As a group, we sometimes find ourselves perhaps overly focused on the issues at hand. We need to look around once in a while and see how far we have come. In the interest of public relations, our Communications Committee is tasked with reflecting on and describing some of our efforts within the community. As a volunteer member of that committee, I want to help get the word out, but it is not my goal to toot our horn too loudly. I just hope to show that our involvement places us at the table where the decisions are made, and which enables us to make a real difference in Lower Downtown.

The LoDo District Inc. is active not just within our local community and downtown Denver, but regionally and beyond. We find ourselves in the role of the enabler and convener; identifying the issues and bringing people to the table. We take an organic approach and our agenda is not static. We promote dialogue and community education, so that various constituent interests can join in an educated discussion and work toward a consensus with the best possible outcome. We have simple goals which include maintaining the quality of life in the District through improvements in the pedestrian experience, including urban design, retail amenities, parking, accessibility, and the like.

As a group, the LoDo District organization is uniquely able to stay in front of the curve on issues that affect our community. Our board membership is broad, and we sit at the table with some heavy hitters. It gives us access to decision makers at the highest level. For example, we gather and disseminate information at various committees for the Downtown Denver Partnership (DDP), educational forums, committees with City of Denver, Denver Union Station (DUS) advisory panels, and many more. Members of the LoDo District truly represent constituent interests.

We often take a progressive stance, which benefits the community through an active leadership role. Current examples include our involvement with Bell Park and the formation of the new overlay district. Board Member Shannon Gifford and Past President Dave Moore are actively involved with the DUS master developer advisory committee. And we interview and make recommendations for Design Review (LDDR) candidates.

An important current issue is the formation of a lower downtown parking district. We are spearheading efforts to identify applicable approaches to resolving this long-term issue. We try to take a rational and educated approach, and look through the pressing chaos to see the bigger picture. Regarding parking, we know the solution must maintain and

further the integrity of the historic district. We must figure out how to manage the impact of growth within our midst: more cars and more people cannot adversely affect the pedestrian experience on our streets and sidewalks. Our parking lots are going away, and we know from experience that placing the entire burden for parking on the developer is not going to work forever. We can't just require new development to provide a minimum parking requirement and assume the issue will take care of itself. Not when your next door neighbor is a regional inter-modal transportation hub – you have to look a little deeper.

We recently brought in parking guru Greg Holle to speak on the parking paradigm shifts he is observing across the country. Greg spoke to a large LoDo audience, and the community interest was amazing. Parking and the applicable zoning that defines it are changing, and it takes foresight and tremendous effort to keep ahead of the game. By looking ahead, we see that modifications to the applicable B-7 zoning requirements may be required. We are working on the long-term solution now, and we hope to make a difference before it is too late.

The Downtown Denver Partnership is taking on the parking issue as they ramp up for their updated Downtown Area Plan. The lower downtown constituency is well represented, with LoDo's Executive Director Fabby Hillyard on the steering committee joined by LoDo board member Shannon Gifford. Local community leaders Dana Crawford and Jerry Glick are also involved at these early discussions.

New development within and around our historic district is a topic of tremendous community interest. The Design Review Board and Landmark Commission are here to guide new development within their established guidelines. But someone has to look at the bigger picture, and work to mitigate the pressure points like parking, transportation, pedestrian connectivity that happen on the fringes of new development. Fortunately, the LoDo District, Inc. and other neighborhood associations are taking an active role to help maintain our quality of life in this wonderful LoDo community.

Get involved with your LoDo District, and help make a difference in your community. Check us out at www.lodo.org, or phone our new office at 303-628-5428.