

What's Next at Union Station?

By Jim Theye, LoDo District

Hello – this is part of the continuing series on what is happening to impact your LoDo District. Our feature this month focuses on what is happening at our local multi-modal transportation hub. Turns out our Union Station is one of the largest train stations east of Chicago. And we voters authorized a massive FasTracks renovation last November. This will indeed be quite a process.

The LoDo District, Inc. has been active in many ways during these initial stages of the Denver Union Station (DUS) redevelopment. Our community owes many thanks to the amazing efforts of several neighbors including Shannon Gifford, Jim Graebner, Barbara Gibson, Gwen Anderson, Larry Gibson, Jerry Glick, and many others who are members of the Union Station Advisory Committee, and attended countless meetings, donating their energy, time, and creative input to help complete the DUS Master Plan and get us to this point in the process. Shannon, Jim, and Brian Klipp co-chaired the Committee. Shannon and Gwen are current LoDo District Board members, Jim and Larry are past LoDo District Presidents, and Barbara served until recently as our Executive Director. Take a look at the Master Plan online at www.denverunionstation.org.

So where are we now? Great question! The vision plan for the transformation of the 124-year old station and its 19.5 acre site is not fully funded through the FasTracks initiative passed by the voters, but the process is moving forward. The owners of the station, RTD and its partners at the City, DRCOG, and CDOT, have initiated the process of identifying a Master Developer for the site. Following some preliminary meetings earlier this year, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) has been issued to prospective developers, and a schedule set to identify a short list of teams for consideration. The schedule is tight, with a Request for Proposal (RFP) due out in September and the Master Developer selected by mid-December, 2005.

Several key issues will be determined during the RFP process, including how the station, and the coordination of public and private development, will eventually be managed. The governance structure of other, similar stations has been under considerable study for years, and it appears that the governance of DUS will likely be a hybrid of several governance models. The primary goal is to build and operate an efficient transportation

facility, but the trick is to provide fair opportunities for public agency, private entity, and general public involvement in the project. In the interim, a governance board known as the Executive Oversight Committee (EOC), a panel of four members representing RTD, DRCOG, CDOT, and the City of Denver is tasked with management of the site, including control of all construction and the selection of the master developer.

Funding is another key issue facing the successful redevelopment team. FasTracks will fund approximately \$200,000,000 of improvements at DUS, including the construction of the light rail transit station below grade, modification of the passenger tunnel, reconstruction of passenger rail tracks, the Downtown Circulator at 18th Street, and the completion of shelters and pedestrian amenities. But an additional \$360 million needed to complete the transportation components of the Master Plan has yet to be identified. Potential funding sources include various local, state and federal programs, along with revenues from development and private transportation providers. You can read more about this on the City website at www.denvergov.org/business.

The Master Plan allows for a maximum of 1,900,000 square feet of total site development, although the eventual buildout is expected to be smaller. This figure could include over 100,000 square feet of retail, 750,000 square feet of commercial office space, a 250,000 square foot hotel, and up to about 400 residential units. Building heights ranging from 65 feet up to 220 feet will be allowed under the creative T-MU 30 zoning plan. Imagine the impact on Lower Downtown Denver!

It will be interesting to see how the RFP process pans out. Attendance at the first public meeting by local developers was strong and there were some significant players with terrific resumes in the mix. However, a redevelopment project of this scale will hopefully catch the eye of prospective developers from other markets.

The implementation schedule for FasTracks calls for construction of various light-rail lines throughout the metropolitan area and the light rail component of DUS to be complete in about 2013. This will take a remarkable effort by all involved. Please stay tuned for further details of this enormous project going on between LoDo and Riverfront Park. It is tremendously exciting to see the progress and envision the implementation of the voter-approved FasTracks project, but it is disconcerting to imagine this process gaining steam without the continued monitoring and input of many at the LoDo District and your local neighborhood groups. Please get involved and be a part of the successful transformation of Denver Union Station. And join the LoDo

District for a front row seat. We are a membership based organization, and we could use your help! Call 303-628-5400 for information, or visit us at www.lodo.org.