

## “Imagine the Future of LoDo”

By Jim Theye, LoDo District, Inc.

What will LoDo look and feel like in 10 to 15 years? No one knows for sure, of course, so there is no right answer. But it is an interesting question to consider, especially in light of the national prominence our fair City has achieved with some of the developments slated for completion in the coming years. These include the transformation of Denver Union Station into a regional transportation hub and two new art museum buildings designed by world-class architects. The list doesn't end there.

Some have mentioned Vancouver, BC is an example of what Denver might one day look like: a vibrant, gleaming city with a historic warehouse district at its core. Let's look ahead and see what might be in store for LoDo a decade or so ahead. Higher oil prices will likely drive more and more residential development in our urban core, and many of our vacant parking lots will transform into shiny new buildings. I am most interested in what it will feel like on the street (and alley) level, as the face of LoDo retail, parking, and culture evolves. I welcome your comments on LoDo's future – drop me a line and I will do a follow up article with your remarks ([comments@lodo.org](mailto:comments@lodo.org)).

First, let's look at some of the new buildings to affect our historic district. Daniel Libeskind, Lead Architect of the Denver Art Museum expansion as well as the Master Planner for the World Trade Center site in Manhattan, was recently quoted in the Rocky Mountain News (10/29/05) as saying that “Denver is a city of the future, not of the past. What is happening in Denver represents the best of what modern architecture is about,” he said in reference to the architectural style of the many new building currently planned for construction in central Denver.

Among the new buildings on LoDo's doorstep are the environmentally-friendly EPA Regional Headquarters at 1595 Wynkoop Street, the Museum of Contemporary Art at 15<sup>th</sup> and Delgany Streets, and the Glass House buildings in Riverfront Park. These and other buildings will impact the pedestrian streetscape of lower downtown, bringing business and residential density, retail opportunities, and first class office space to the edges of LoDo.

And these are just the buildings scheduled for completion in the next few years! Factor in what is on the drawing boards for the lot next to the Sugar Building, at the old Postal Annex parking lot, and a host of other currently vacant sites and the density really begins to build. It is starting to happen fast, and these will be exciting times.

The residential, retail, and office components of the Union Station master plan call for an amazing volume of additional build-out. And elsewhere, between LoDo and Riverfront, the commercial and residential parcels currently held by Trillium and others may become Denver's ultimate urban sky scape.

By 2015, the transformation of Union Station should route high volumes of light rail and other traffic directly into LoDo, and we will feel the impacts from the pedestrian, bus, motorcycle, taxi, and other traffic moving folks from DUS into the downtown urban center. The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall Shuttle won't be able to keep up, so we will see a new people-moving circulator along 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> streets. We hope the bus traffic coming in and out of LoDo will be efficient and not disruptive to the pedestrian scale of the neighborhood. (The Downtown Multimodal Action Plan (DMAP) is in the works, and we hope they listen to our concerns.)

In Vancouver, several of the newer buildings are constructed with a historical design and fabric for the first 3-6 floors, before stepping back and building up with glass and steel as they stretch skyward. This design has helped create a feeling of consistency to the streetscape level within the historic sector. LoDo planners are generally cautious of infill buildings designed to copy the historic look, but Vancouver may provide a design example to help overcome this concern.

With some of the above-mentioned developments, Denver is likely to begin to attract an international-style retail component. Local commercial brokers are beginning to talk about the next phase of LoDo retail, and names like Prada and Gucci may be coming to a streetscape near you. Internationally owned hotels and retail centers may become commonplace, and could lead to a cultural diversity never seen on the western plains. Imagine stopping into one of the local groceries, galleries, or other venues and hearing people speaking Japanese and French. Maybe the visitors would be in town to catch the fast train to ski at Copper, or possibly to attend a game at the new Soccer or Rugby stadium. There may be some Madison Avenue in Denver's future.

All of this discussion brings to bear the enormous responsibility of Denver's city planners. Our Lower Downtown Design Review Board has their hands full as well, and these mayoral-appointed volunteers are diligent in their efforts to preserve the fragile historic fabric of our LoDo streetscape, while enhancing the architectural significance of our mixed-use community.

As well, the LoDo District is actively monitoring changes in our neighborhood. We have aligned with the Design Review Board to facilitate communication and promote LoDo diversity. If you live, work, or play in LoDo, please join us and encourage your company to do the same. We are a membership based organization, and we need your involvement.

On behalf of LoDo, please share your comments on these ideas. Visit us at [www.lodo.org](http://www.lodo.org), and drop us an email comment to [comments@lodo.org](mailto:comments@lodo.org). Our phone number is 303-628-5428. We look forward to hearing from you.