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Reclaiming West Colfax

■ Planned transit-oriented developments and future light-rail access have developers eyeing properties for improvement.

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The stretch of Colfax Avenue west of Federal Boulevard long has been known for its car dealerships, retro motels, pawn shops and check-cashing stores.

Westword called Casa Bonita in the JCRS Shopping Center on Colfax “the world’s weirdest Mexican restaurant,” because of its cliff divers, pirate cave and staged gunfights, as well as its food.

But in recent years, new transit-oriented-development (TOD) efforts, complementing West

Colfax’s major bus line and future light rail, have started cropping up along the street and helped revitalize areas around them. The West Corridor light-rail line is being built just south of Colfax, and is expected to be completed in 2013.

“West Colfax has one of the city’s busiest bus lines,” said Dan Shah, economic development director for the West Colfax Business Improvement District (BID). “Our TOD strategy is also to build on the West Corridor light-rail line for housing, mixed-use development and transportation planning. We want to ensure development is equitable.”

The Lakewood Reinvestment Authority helped kick off the latest spate of redevelopment along West Colfax in the early 2000s,



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Dan Shah, director of economic development for the West Colfax Business Improvement District, outside the Lake Steam Baths on West Colfax Avenue. The family-run business has been operating since 1927.

when it converted a former Kmart site to the Walmart Supercenter-anchored Creekside Shopping Center at Colfax and Sheridan Boulevard.

More recent projects include a new Denver Public Library branch and Mi Pueblo Latin Market grocery store in the works near Federal Boulevard. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless’ latest housing project is in the early stages of construction farther west, on the site of the old Shuffle Inn biker bar near Sheridan Boulevard.

Weston Solutions Inc. is building a mixed-use project, including office and retail space, near the Garrison Station light-rail station planned for the corner of Garrison Street and West 13th Avenue.

To enhance new development, the West Colfax BID is working to make the street more user-friendly and sustainable within its boundaries, between Federal and Sheridan, through a \$1.2 million street-improvement project.

That program includes adding medians, on-street parking to slow the traffic flow, solar-powered lighting, landscaping and artwork. Construction is expected to start this spring and be finished in summer.

To help fund the program, the BID obtained \$150,000 from the Governor’s Energy Office and raised \$331,000 in federal funds. The district also is helping businesses along Colfax get GreenFAX funds and Xcel Energy Inc. (NYSE: XEL) rebates for energy-efficiency improvements they make.

“The next layer to look at is renewables,” Shah said. “In 2011, we’ll look at solar gardens on some rooftops to provide energy. It’s not clear yet if that’s a viable idea, but we’re exploring it.”

Details of new development projects under way along West Colfax include:

Festival Plaza at Avondale

The Festival Plaza shopping center at West Colfax and Irving Street in Denver is getting a face-lift with the addition of a new mixed-use project, including the \$12 million Westside Library and the Mi Pueblo grocery store. Mi Pueblo already has stores in Aurora, Commerce City and Thornton, and expects to open its West Colfax location this year.

The retail center is owned by Shanghai Land Investment LLC, whose principals include Denver

WEST COLFAX

Major artery: West Colfax Avenue

Street namesake: Schuyler Colfax, vice president to U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant. Originally called Golden Road, but renamed for Colfax in 1896.

Incorporation: Became part of the city of Denver in 1897.

Cultural makeup: Central and Eastern European Jewish early on, now largely Hispanic.

Start of revitalization efforts: 1978

Landmark businesses: Pig ‘N Whistle Restaurant (burned down April 2010), Big Bunny Motel (formerly Bugs Bunny Motel), Casa Bonita Mexican restaurant, Lake Steam Baths

Neighborhood groups: West Colfax Business Improvement District, West Colfax Partnership Inc., West Colfax Community Association, West Colfax Association of Neighbors

Sources: Denver Public Library, West Colfax BID

WEST COLFAX: New apartments, offices focus on 'green'

immigration attorney Woon Ki Lau.

"Festival Plaza is the gateway to West Colfax, a catalytic piece of property," said Aaron Mirapol, president and CEO of the Urban Land Conservancy (ULC). The nonprofit is the master developer for the new housing/commercial project at Festival Plaza.

The ULC's one-acre, mixed-use project, which has no official name, will be next to Denver's new library, to be located at the corner of Colfax and Irving.

The conservancy plans to develop a six-story, roughly 70-unit affordable housing project, with Del Norte Neighborhood Development Corp. After that, the ULC expects to build a two-story, 14,000-square-foot commercial building with office and/or retail space. Those properties will cost \$20 million to \$25 million to develop, according to the group.

The ULC is buying two acres at Festival Plaza, and it will sell one acre to the City and County of Denver for the library. The conservancy hopes to close on the deal in late February.

"We're focused on the residential and library components first," Mirapol said. "The city wants the library to open in 2013 ... and we hope to have people moving into the residential part of our project about the same time."

Both the library and the ULC's housing project are scheduled to start construction in late summer.

Renaissance West End Flats

After buying the old Shuffle Inn on West Colfax a couple of years ago, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless demolished the bar in early January to make way for its Renaissance West End Flats rental-housing project, with ground-floor commercial space.

The 101-unit, \$17 million property will be at



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John Reinsma is senior development manager for Weston Solutions Inc. in metro Denver, which is building a mixed-use project, including office buildings, at West Colfax Avenue and Garrison Street in Lakewood.

5050-5000 W. Colfax Ave., between Zenobia and Yates streets. With a 13-month construction schedule, the project is scheduled to be finished in early 2012.

"We talked to the West Colfax BID about what we might do there, and they suggested we could do a better, more impactful project if we could redevelop the whole block," said John Parvensky, the CCH's president and CEO. "So, we did that with a little negotiation with the planning department."

The Renaissance apartments will be built to LEED Silver sustainability standards, according to Parvensky, but the CCH "won't go to the expense of getting LEED certification."

LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and is the U.S. Green

Building Council's rating for energy-efficient buildings.

(For more information about the West End Flats, see the Q&A with Parvensky on next page.)

Garrison Station mixed-use project

Weston Solutions Inc. broke ground on this project's first phase — a 32,000-square-foot, two-story office building — in 2010, and is expected to be finished in the second quarter of this year. A global environmental and redevelopment firm based in West Chester, Pa., Weston has its Rocky Mountain headquarters in Lakewood, and may move that office to the new project.

"We intended on putting our Rocky Mountain headquarters in the new building, but we've had interest in the full building from a user, so we're still deciding on that," said John Reinsma, senior development manager for Weston in metro Denver. "It's a great problem to have."

Weston's TOD is on 4.5 acres at the corner of West Colfax and Garrison Street in Lakewood, and near the planned Garrison Station light-rail station. The company bought the property, formerly a car dealership, for \$3.15 million cash in 2009.

The office building, designed by Denver architecture firm Klipp, is pre-certified for a LEED Gold designation.

Plans for the project's initial phase also call for a free-standing bank, at the corner of Colfax and Garrison. Weston is negotiating with an undisclosed bank to buy the site; the lender then would build its own structure.

The Weston project's second phase is to include an office building with lower-level retail space that could include 60,000 to 115,000 square feet, depending on tenant demand, according to Reinsma. It could be as tall as five stories.



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