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2011 ASLA Design Awards

Filmore Plaza
Merit Award
Design Workshop, Denver



Design over \$500,000 Construction Budget

Project Name | Fillmore Plaza
Project Location | Denver, Colorado
Construction Budget | \$3.25 million

Project Summary | Since closing to traffic and converting to a pedestrian street in 1987, Fillmore Plaza had steadily declined into an underused series of open spaces flanked by underperforming retail stores. In addition, with landscape plantings removed and the two fountains rarely operating, the Plaza was no longer a desirable public space within the Cherry Creek North Shopping District. Through extensive visioning and public outreach by the design team, the new Fillmore Plaza has become a hybrid street with two-way vehicular traffic and on-street parking that can be closed off to traffic during planned events throughout the year. Monolithic brick paving, a custom center canopy with adjacent show power electrical capabilities, permanent stone planters, elegant benches, internally illuminated light ‘blades,’ custom wayfinding signage and accent lighting set the Fillmore Plaza design apart, allowing it to be the gateway and premier event space in Cherry Creek North.

Purpose of Project | Closed to vehicular traffic and uninspiring to pedestrians, Fillmore Plaza was a declining and underutilized space. Through the culmination of an effort that began in 2006 with an election by the District’s constituents to approve \$18.5 million in bonds for the specific purpose of upgrading the streetscapes in the 16-block district, Fillmore Plaza was a major focus of the Cherry Creek North Shopping District’s first major streetscape improvement in more than 20 years. The Plaza, now a two-way vehicular and pedestrian space, and the premier event space in the District, was constructed on schedule and under budget in only six months, just in time for the 2011 Cherry Creek Arts Festival held during the July 4th holiday.

Role of Landscape Architect vs. Role of Other Participants | The Landscape Architect was the lead consultant of an interdisciplinary team that included Environmental Graphics; Transportation Analysis and Planning; Civil Engineering; Lighting Design; Electrical Engineering; Structural Engineering; and Irrigation Design. The landscape architect developed a project vision and guiding principles with the District’s Program Manager, iterated concept plan alternatives with extensive neighborhood input, designed and documented the site design elements, and reviewed the quality of the construction.

Special Factors

Major Event Space in the District | Most successful and enduring districts have a focal space — in America this is usually a busy Main Street; in Europe, a plaza. Fillmore Plaza, as a hybrid street, serves both roles. It is the crown jewel of the Cherry Creek North Shopping District and the focal point of the five enhanced event streets in the District. Fillmore Plaza is a significant entry point for cars and pedestrians, and also a destination for shopping and events in its own right. As the main venue in the District for a wide range of events throughout the calendar year, Fillmore Plaza required special design focus, additional facilities and a larger budget than the other enhanced event streets in the District.

One major community concern was the ability to host large and small events on the Plaza without vertical encumbrances such as curbs and traffic-related devices. The design team, in coordination with the District’s event planning group, designed a space to accommodate their needs and provide flexibility for different planned events. The landscape architect ran monthly meetings with the community stakeholders, the District and the city council representative to gain consensus on the design. While the north half of the street closest to the core of the District was where most of the events had been staged in the old plaza, the new street has two distinct aesthetics and functions, capable of hosting a wide range of events throughout the year. The north half is curbless (an unprecedented design, found on no other public street in the City), has no on-street parking and provides a relatively level area for functions. The south half, with a four-inch rolled curb section and 10 on-street metered parking spaces, has been designed for larger tents and event staging.

The unique curbless design on the north side of the street addresses public safety and stormwater concerns. A linear trench drain defines the 'flowline' of the street with retractable stainless steel bollards surrounded by detectable warning devices. Stormwater is detained and filtered in an underground vault at the north end of the Plaza to satisfy the water quality requirements. Movable planters with low-water-using ornamental grasses were included between the bollards to provide another layer of pedestrian protection as well as to demarcate the drive lanes. During an event, the planters can be rolled to the Plaza's edge and the bollards can be lowered into underground sleeves. For events with tents, permanent in-grade anchor points on a 15-foot grid allow for easier set up, negating the need for weighted barrels that clutter the event space. These seemingly small considerations greatly reduce the operational cost and time necessary for each event's setup and breakdown, enabling the street to remain open longer for the retailers.

Increased Economic Vitality | As one of the best spaces to showcase the District's "brand," Fillmore Plaza plays a central role in capturing the attention of vehicles and shoppers. It is positioned immediately adjacent to the Cherry Creek Shopping Center in alignment with an existing pedestrian crossing. A right-in, right-out vehicular turn at the First Avenue intersection introduces cars and increases retail visibility with on-street parking. The physical improvements to Fillmore Plaza stimulate pedestrian visitation. Existing boutique clothiers and lunchtime restaurants have been joined by additional restaurants and retail that have begun to occupy the new and renovated adjacent buildings on the ground-floor level. The building owners cite the new design as a major attractor for retail tenants. Residential condominiums and offices above the first floor provide eyes into the Plaza. The energy of good retail on Fillmore Plaza will help to sustain businesses District-wide.

High-Quality Renovation | To return Fillmore Plaza as a signature place, a destination and a gateway for the entire District, the same quality of materials and design were applied to the hybrid design as were included in the other District improvements. Just as in the larger District-wide enhancements, Fillmore Plaza was thought of as one large Art and Garden Place that attracts users and creates a new identity for the District. The design was comprised of:

- 20 custom light 'blades' that provide a daytime presence and identity as well as a nighttime ambience and safety lighting. The internally lit 'blade' LED lights can be programmed to range from a warm white color for an everyday scene to up to 127 different colors for special events and seasonal holidays. The lights brand the street providing a memorable experience.
- Increased seating from 100 to 450 linear feet, four additional bike racks, two additional trash receptacles as well as two recycling receptacles. Additionally, the Colorado Buff Sandstone walls were designed with seating in mind and add about 250 linear feet of informal seating throughout the Plaza.
- A center canopy with a suspended ring that holds the District's name is the focal point for events, distinguishing Fillmore Plaza daily and drawing users into the Plaza to activate the space
- Intensified plantings of seasonal perennials and shrubs below 24 medium-caliper deciduous shade trees provide shade and human comfort. In addition to the planting-mix soil, the design included CU Structural Soil that will provide support for the sand set brick pavers and establish the necessary air and volume for adequate tree root growth.
- Monolithic clay brick paving in earth toned hues spans from building to building to create a rich floor on which activities can occur. The pedestrian areas are sand set over compacted sub-base while the vehicular areas have a bituminous setting bed to satisfy City and County of Denver street standards. The design factored in the paver module size to provide full pavers as much as possible, therefore increasing the longevity of the flexible paving system.

Since the new Fillmore Plaza has opened, the Cherry Creek North Shopping District has seen an increase in vitality, pedestrian presence and retail activity. Fillmore Plaza truly has become *the* premier event space in the District.



