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A rendering of the Denver International Airport City, which aims to be a market-focused strategy for commercial development on the non-aeronautical land owned by the airport.

Rendering courtesy of Design Workshop.

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Happy New Year from ASLA Colorado! I am very excited to assume the role of Chapter President, and I look forward to working with many of you over the coming years. We have some very exciting initiatives on the horizon and we are very hopeful that they will continue to be opportunities that our members find interesting, helpful and fun.

Here’s a rundown of what to expect from your chapter:

**Board Restructuring**

With thoughtful guidance from ASLA National we have decided to split our very large Executive Committee (one of the largest in the country) into two separate oversight bodies. A smaller, nine person Executive Board will now meet monthly to manage the day-to-day operations of the chapter, while a larger group of nearly 30 advisors will comprise the Council of Directors. The Council will help guide the larger, big picture ideas for the chapter. As always meetings will continue to be held on the first Wednesday of every month at 5PM and is open to all members of the chapter.

Along with these changes to the structure of the chapter’s leadership we will also be focusing our efforts on the active involvement of twelve key committees. Various Board and Council members will be the chairs for these committees, and we will be looking for volunteers to help us reach our goals for the coming years. The twelve operational committees are:

- Advocacy
- Communications
- Conference
- Education
- Events & Service
- Fellows
- Contractor Outreach
- Membership
- Organization
- Public Relations
- Sponsorship & Advertising
- Student Chapters

**2011 “Your Environment. Designed” Campaign**

On August 17th ASLA undertook an unprecedented effort to raise public awareness for the profession of landscape architecture. Members, non-members, and allies of the profession took action in a simple, unified way to communicate the importance of the profession in a way we’ve never been able to.

To do this ASLA has adopted the mantra of The Understory—the section of a forest between the floor and canopy that teems with life. It’s the Understory that connects a forest’s ecosystem together. Despite its importance, we easily miss the Understory for the canopy, for the trees. As landscape architects, much of our work is similarly missed. That’s why ASLA set up The Understory as a rallying cry for landscape architects to step out and tell our story to the public.

The event consisted of groups of landscape architects engaging the general public in plazas or green spaces to increase public awareness of the profession. Here in Colorado we had over ___ landscape architects participating.

**National Landscape Architecture Month**

Hoping to pick up on the successes of The Understory from last year we will be trying something new this year for National Landscape Architecture Month in April. The Events & Service and Public Relations Committees will be working together to plan events to happen throughout the month and across the state. We’ve typically used the Doors Open Denver event to be our outlet for NLAM, so please plan on getting involved this year for something exciting.

**2014 National Conference & Expo**

I hope that most of you know that the ASLA National Conference and Expo will be coming to the Mile High City in 2014. Many of the organizational changes that we are making to the chapter are in preparation for this great event and showcase for our chapter. I hope that several of you will want to be involved in the pre-planning for the conference.

**Awards Event & Holiday Party**

To help bring a close to 2011 we tried something quite different for our Awards Event. On December 1st we held our first ever Awards Event and Holiday Party at the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown. With 190 in attendance it was a great success. The event was highlighted with a phenomenal keynote speech by Auden Schendler of the Aspen Skiing Company, the JSR Foundation silent auction, and a three piece jazz combo. The night was about celebrating the profession and having fun. We will definitely be doing it again this year. We hope that even more of you will come.

Thanks,

Brian Koenigberg, RLA, AICP
Colorado Chapter President
Executive Committee & Council of Directors

The Executive Board is the governing body of ASLA Colorado and is chaired by Brian Koenigberg, Chapter President. The board meets monthly to provide guidance and direction relating to the activities and finances of the Chapter. The Council of Directors meets quarterly to support the executive board in providing region- and practice-oriented direction on issues related to the program, activities and membership of the Chapter. Executive Board Meetings typically occur on the first Wednesday of each month, beginning at 5:00 pm, and are held at member offices along the Front Range. Council of Directors Meetings typically occur mid-quarter and coincide with the Executive Board Meetings. Attendees typically include those on the Executive Board and Council of Directors respectively. All chapter members are welcome to attend or to participate in person or by teleconference.

February: The February Council of Directors Meeting was highlighted by special guest Marilen Reimer from the American Council of Engineering Companies. She presented on their progress for preparing for the DORA Sunset review for Engineering, Architecture and Land Surveyors. Their review will be in July of 2013. We are of course supportive of their continuation of licensure and are using this opportunity to learn from their experiences and request that the wording of their laws reflect the wording of ours. Our meeting continued with a general discussion of finances and events for the year. Mark Tabor reiterated the switch to the designation of PLA (Professional Landscape Architect) in place of RLA for licensed landscape architects. Each committee provided an update on progress for the year and how they intend to move forward.

March: The March Executive Board Meeting was held at Design Workshop’s office in Denver. We discussed the Pro-green expo which had a good showing of about 50 ASLA Colorado members. A discussion ensued about the desire to increase member attendance at that event and potential offerings that would draw in more members. We also discussed the desire to fill all positions on the Executive Board and appoint or elect a President Elect to serve in that open role. We reviewed the new format for financial statements and discussed the process and next steps of getting CCLA (our lobbying arm) reinstated.

April: Our April Executive Board Meeting was held at CSU to coincide with CSU LA Days. Thank you to everyone at CSU for hosting us, we had a great evening and were inspired by Warren Byrd’s presentation. We discussed recent events such as the Metro Cocktail Reception which had a great showing of about 30 people and was very well received. We discussed the upcoming Lunch and Learn series to start this Summer as well as the current budget and open positions on the board.

Volunteer opportunities for interested members are always available. If you are interested in volunteering for a committee or an event that is hosted or supported by ASLA Colorado contact Judith Ward, Volunteer Coordinator, at jward@criticalhabitats.com. For more information on current ASLA Colorado events, be sure to visit www.aslacolorado.org and review the “Calendar” tab located on the website’s title bar. If you have a design event you would like listed on our Chapter’s social media pages, please email details to info@aslacolorado.org. To be placed on an upcoming agenda contact Brian Koenigberg, Chapter President, at brian@kmlstudio.net. Contact information relating to the Executive Board and Council of Directors members can be found by clicking on the “Chapter Leadership” page from the “About” tab on the main title bar.

Government Affairs

The 2012 legislative session is underway and we are monitoring legislative activities. SB12-006 “Efficiencies in State Regulatory System” has been introduced in the Colorado Senate. The bill doesn’t directly threaten state licensure, but it does call for creating a task force to review the State’s regulatory system and report its findings and recommendations to the committee on legal services by January 1, 2013. The committee on legal services will then recommend to the general assembly such legislation regarding the findings and recommendations of the task force “as may be necessary”. Depending on the recommendations of this task force, there is a potential that we could face a challenge to our licensure in 2013. Licensed professionals should keep a close eye on this bill.

The ASLA Colorado is actively promoting compliance by municipal and county government agencies with the “Landscape Architects Professional Licensing Act”, passed by the State in 2007. We are seeing a positive trend towards compliance with the state law. The recently passed Longmont Landscape Open Space Regulations states: “In accordance with current State Statutes all landscape plans must be designed by a licensed professional landscape architect except for the following: 1. Residential Landscape Design, consisting of landscape design services for single- and multi-family residential properties of four or fewer units not including common areas;” Both the City of Golden and the Town of Castle Rock have code changes pending that will eliminate inconsistencies with the state law. In a memorandum to the City Council attached to ordinance 1916, the Director of Planning and Development states, “This item relates to a condition brought to staff’s attention in 2011, and Council’s decision whether to remove an inconsistency between the Municipal Code and state statutes. Staff is informed that in 2007 the Colorado Legislature enacted the ‘Landscape Architects Professional Licensing Act’.”
Licensing Act. This statement demonstrates that the message is getting through, and by pointing out inconsistencies with state law we can help local government agencies understand the need to update their codes.

Are your city and county government agencies in compliance with the state law? If not let them know. Let’s help them understand and implement the State Licensing Act. ASLA Colorado has created an advocacy package to educate local government agencies about the Licensing Act and to help persuade them to update their codes and procedures to be in alignment with provisions of the State Law. The advocacy documents can now be downloaded from the advocacy page of our website, under the heading “Licensure Compliance Materials”. If you would like hard copies of the advocacy package to promote compliance in your community, please let us know.

ASLA Colorado meets regularly with the GreenCo Legislative Committee (and their lobbyists) to keep apprised of ongoing and upcoming issues of legislative and regulatory importance. When an urgent issue of importance arises it is conveyed to the membership as an advisory in the bi-monthly E-News Bulletin. ASLA Colorado is represented in the legislature and before state agencies by the Colorado Council of Landscape Architects. Gregory Williams of Redpoint Resources LLC and Scott Meiklejohn of Meiklejohn Consulting LLC are under contract from December-May to monitor state legislative activity and regulatory developments. They also represent ASLA Colorado at meetings involving other allied organizations on new and ongoing issues of mutual concern. Neil McLane is Vice President of Government Affairs and chair of the ASLA Colorado Government Affairs committee. This committee also oversees the activities of the Colorado Council of Landscape Architects. Neil can be reached at neil@mclaneassoc.com.
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In 2010, Denver International Airport (DIA) and the City and County of Denver took a major step in DIA’s evolution to fulfill its role as gateway to Colorado and the Rocky Mountains. They invited firms from around the world to submit proposals to assist DIA in planning, assessing and creating an airport city as the core of and competitive accelerator for the emerging Denver Aerotropolis. Later that year, DIA selected Colorado ASLA-member firm, Design Workshop, and Denver-based CH2M Hill as members of a collaborative team lead by the Canadian planning firm, MXD Development Strategists. Filling out the team were Dr. John Kasarda, an internationally known expert in Aerotropolis and airport city planning, Integrity Parking, Transcore and Ambient Energy.

Over the course of 2011, the team worked closely with DIA and numerous public and private sector stakeholders to facilitate an interactive planning process. They met with each of the jurisdictions surrounding DIA – Commerce City, the cities of Aurora, Brighton, and Bennett and Adams County – with many of the land owners and active developers, as well as the agencies and organizations with interest in the development of the land in and around the airport. Concurrently, the team prepared market, economic, financial, feasibility, benchmarking, infrastructure, transportation, physical planning, urban design and branding analysis to evolve the DIA airport city development strategy.

The essence of the Airport City Denver plan is a market-focused strategy for commercial development on the non-aeronautical land owned by the airport. Airports around the world are recognizing the opportunities that can be realized through airport city development and are progressively seeking ways to leverage their property assets and “gateway connectivity” to generate non-airline revenues and stimulate regional economic development. With over 53 square miles of land, DIA presents a significant opportunity to connect the Metro Denver region and Colorado businesses to the world. Airport City Denver will create opportunities to incubate employment, diversify the economy, enhance tourism, and attract international investment.

A key feature of the DIA airport city development strategy is to target specific economic clusters of complementary businesses including aviation, aerospace, logistics, renewable energy, bioscience, and agrotech, and their supporting downstream technologies and industries. This foundation of economic activity leverages DIA’s property assets and connectivity to provide the catalyst for regional economic benefits, including the introduction and inducement of over 70,000 new jobs in the Denver Metro Region over the next 20 years.
On April 25, Airport City Denver was officially announced and introduced to the world by Mayor Michael B. Hancock of the City and County of Denver at the 2012 Global Airport Cities Conference and Exhibition in Denver, hosted by DIA. This event signifies the first step of launching Airport City Denver.

“Airport City Denver and the aerotropolis around it, built with regional cooperation, will enable us to all succeed together.”
- Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock
By Susan McCabe

“We are planning a community for people that haven’t even been born. If you plan for today or even for a few years out - you miss it. We must anticipate what the 21st century community’s values and lifestyles will be.”

-Harold Smethills, Managing Director of Sterling Ranch.

Begin with the best of yester-year, blend with a large dose of learning from suburbia mistakes, carefully stir in regional issues, neighboring concerns, county approval of an historic water-efficiency plan and a large helping of natural resource conservation—finally, cover everything with technology and a generous portion of nature, and Metro-Denver’s newest sustainable planned community is created, Sterling Ranch. Located in NW Douglas County, this 3400-acre development will one day (20 year build out) give rise to: seven close-knit, walkable villages, 37 percent open space, a 100-acre sports village, 30 miles of trails (horse, bike, walking), community supported agriculture, home grown food, rainwater harvesting (you heard right, RAINWATER HARVESTING), schools, a medical facility, health-conscious residents and oh yes, COMMUNITY.

The Best of Yester-Year: Visiting my elderly Aunt (90 years young) last year, I experienced first-hand what it was like to live in the “good old days”. Her little hometown in Indiana still has that old-fashioned charm. She walks everywhere (never learned to drive), visits a restaurant or shop in the town square every day, and always seems to run into friends and neighbors. In town, as we sit down to eat, she calls the waitress by name and asks about her children. She likes to talk about her “free range” childhood: riding bikes, playing outside, swimming in the river, visiting her friends, walking to school, attending and competing in the county fair, socializing in town and knowing her neighbors and community leaders. This way of life is what many Sterling Ranch residents will experience. Contained villages anchored by elementary schools are planned with a walkable layout, where residents can travel by foot or bike to the village center with shops, restaurants and church. Residents walk a quarter mile or less to reach a playground, park or open space with a community trail system that leads to the larger Town Center shopping area, the middle and high schools and a 100-acre, world-class sports village. Housing in each village will be a mix of single family and patio homes, along with multi-family apartments, condominiums and townhomes. Most homes will have smaller yards for water efficiency and be in close proximity to one another to encourage neighborhood interaction.
Illustration 1 depicts the Willow Creek open space and wildlife corridor at Sterling Ranch - a one-quarter mile wide stretch that preserves an important riparian area. (Illustration courtesy of Linda Droeger)

Illustration 2 displays a view from the eastern border adjacent a neighboring community that requested a two to five acre buffer encompassing horse properties reflective of its existing ranchettes. (Illustration courtesy of Linda Droeger)

Illustration 3 is of the single-family clustered housing in close-knit villages with parks surrounded by open space to prevent sprawl. Thirty-seven percent – 1,250 acres – of land at Sterling Ranch has been preserved for open space, parks and wildlife corridors. (Illustration courtesy of Linda Droeger)
Learning From Mistakes: As suburbia matures into old age, the lifestyle norms that were knowingly and unknowingly created over the last 70 years are being evaluated and challenged. Many professional leaders in design, planning, health care and environment are focusing on our built environment and connecting it to poor lifestyle choices that have produced: overweight and obesity issues, diabetes, poor general health, little community interaction, apathy towards conservation and environment and children who are actually afraid to play outside.

At Sterling Ranch, all these detrimental lifestyle norms are being uprooted. Planning with the past in mind helps create a healthy future as past mistakes are addressed and rectified:

- **Car oriented environment**: Sterling Ranch (SR) - Narrow streets in villages, traffic calming on major roadways, emphasis on trails and pedestrian-bike R-O-W, open space and regional sports complex. All will encourage activity and exercise as part of day-to-day living.

- **Car oriented mentality**: SR - Provides convenient and safe ways to walk and ride bikes for most daily errands. Car traffic and parking are separate from pedestrian and pedestrian areas. Homes will be developed that provide for the home-based entrepreneur or small business. Everyday errands can be made close to home, and walking or biking will be encouraged.

- **Unsafe biking and walking**: SR - Traffic calming, signage, narrow streets to reduce speeds, a hierarchy of roads and close-knit density to create community eyes on the street.

- **Hurried lifestyle**: SR - Encourages conservation, growing own food or taking part in a community supported agriculture program, walking and biking as part of everyday lifestyle, community interaction in the village, local restaurants that encourage leisurely, healthy dining or sipping coffee with neighbors.

- **Attached garages/ isolated houses/all the same**: SR - Will develop a variety of housing types, thus the population will be diverse. Front porches, cluster housing, small pocket parks, elementary school anchors and the village center will encourage interaction and support.

- **Wasteful with water**: SR - Has developed a comprehensive water plan to use just one-third the water historically required in Douglas County. Water demand will be managed with a water budget for each home, low-water landscapes and gardens, and water-efficient irrigation systems. In addition, SR will be Colorado's first rainwater harvesting community, which will create further water savings. Managing demand, with the addition of rainwater harvesting, will ensure that water is treated as the precious commodity that it is.

The 100-acre Sterling Ranch Sports Village – a state-of-the-art youth sports village designed to attract regional and national tournament play. Most of the fields will be artificial turf in keeping with the vision to be Colorado’s most water efficient community. Sterling Ranch is also the state’s first rainwater harvesting community, with the sports village’s championship fields of natural grass irrigated with captured rainwater. (Photo courtesy of Linda Droeger)
This Water-Smart landscape demonstrates the smaller yard concept, along with flowering low-water plants irrigated by water-efficient systems. Sterling Ranch plans to use one-third the water historically required in Douglas County with demand management, low-water plants and grasses and innovative water systems. (Photo courtesy of Linda Droeger)

Regional Issues: One catalyst for the Sterling Ranch development effort has been to be an active solution to regional problems, not a contributor. From water and natural resource conservation to economic development, to providing regional facilities such as the sports complex, a high school and middle school, post office, public facilities and retail areas, Sterling Ranch is becoming a leader and will help the Chatfield Valley become a great place to live and work.

Neighboring Concerns: Building a relationship with neighboring communities has been a major part of the planning effort. Listening to existing residents in more than 100 community meetings sponsored by Sterling Ranch, incorporating their ideas and concerns, and communicating throughout the planning process have dictated several key design elements, such as no ridge-top development, village density reflective of surrounding areas, greenbelt buffers and maintaining wildlife corridors. In addition, maintaining more than one-third of the land as open space and providing much needed regional facilities schools and a medical facility have become key components of the Sterling Ranch Master Plan in response to both community and regional desires. Community supported agriculture, 4-H programs, and community service activities are other areas that will encourage interaction with neighbors as the community grows and develops.

Historic Water-Efficiency Plan: Sterling Ranch is the first of ten test programs set up in Colorado to monitor the amount of rainwater falling on a native site and then determine how much actually flows into the river. Climate stations are monitoring daily weather, and other equipment is recording and dating water flow. Monitoring will quantify how much rainwater actually makes it into the river. A recent study by Colorado water entities estimated that only three percent of rainwater ends up in the river—the rest evaporates or is absorbed in the land. The plans for water harvesting at Sterling Ranch include everything from capturing rain from rooftops for outdoor irrigation to reusing parking lot, sidewalk and street runoff, to filling underground storage tanks beneath ball fields to irrigate the very few fields that are not made of artificial turf. In addition, every home will have a water budget that a family must adhere to; Sterling Ranch plans to educate the residents about water conservation and rain-water harvesting techniques.

Technology: To run all of its projects and monitor natural resources efficiently and thoroughly, technology will be a key part of the built community. Fiber optics and other technological advances will help Sterling Ranch monitor its progress and reach its goals regarding water conservation, energy savings, traffic patterns and facility use.

Nature, The Setting: Located in the Chatfield Valley, Sterling Ranch is literally surrounded by nature: Chatfield State Park and reservoir to the north, Roxborough State Park to the southwest, the Colorado trail system to the west and the beautiful views of the hogback and Rocky Mountain foothills. Undulating prairie topography, along with wildlife and even cultural resources (a rare archeology site with Ice Age Mammoths) give the community character and will offer the residents and visitors a chance to explore, exercise and live a back-to-nature lifestyle.
“I’d like to commend the owners of this project for having such a wonderful vision for developing a large area of homes and leaving it in such a protected environment.”

-Jan Schilmoeller, chair of Environmental Committee, Roxborough Park

Does Sterling Ranch have the recipe for success in the 21st Century? The special qualities that people will clamor for? The right ingredients to satisfy those who commit and those who visit? The staying power to finish and stick to their values? Only time will tell, but from what I can see, hearts are in the right place, and the vision, if fulfilled, will create a healthy, friendly, active outdoors, conservation-conscious community—a community that may be able to satisfy that secret longing in many of us for a simpler and healthier way of life.

Susan McCabe is a licensed landscape architect with over 30 years of experience. She has been self-employed for 19 years and has a BLA from the University of Illinois (’78) and an MA in Urban Design (’84) from the University of Colorado. Susan is also a master gardener and certified fitness instructor. She has recently developed her own blog and invites all to visit at: www.yourgardennylife.blogspot.com.

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DISTURBING THE URBAN:
The Living City Block LODO and Regenerative Urban Living Systems

By Patsy McEntee

One overcast morning, after a late spring snow, I found myself negotiating heavy patches of slush amid cracked concrete lifts on my way to a meeting at the Webb Building in downtown Denver. Perhaps it was the dim morning light of cumulus snow clouds or maybe it was my attention to the ground as I did not want to show up to my meeting with a broken nose or a scarred knee, but I was unexpectedly distracted from my path. A lush patch of smooth bromegrass grew exuberantly out of a decorative steel tree well. The tree had failed in its place and left behind an opening for some other biophysical event to occur. Among a sea of grey concrete panels of pockmarked sidewalk and street, this small event, combined with climatic conditions, produced a rather profound phenomenological experience; at the base of towering structures of glass and cement, weathered brown steel grates with black striping voids allow air, water and sediment to collect. Bright green blades standing erect at least ten inches amid the snow and steel. One living system thrives where another had failed.

For those of us who are transplants from the east and west coasts or from other mixed deciduous forests of the US that receive more than 20” of rainfall annually, the landscape of Denver and the Colorado Front Range does not seem unusual. Tree-lined streets and Kentucky Bluegrass lawns irrigated from what was commonly thought to be endless supplies of glacier-fed reservoirs have fed this delusion. The 2002 drought was a wake-up call to those who have watched the population explode on the Front Range and have wondered about the limits of our water resources for local agriculture, landscape maintenance and individual use and consumption. Today, metro-Denver residents use over 48 gallons of water a day on outdoor irrigation (www.DenverWater.org 2011). But while population growth has certainly taxed these resources, trends to become “resource efficient,” “sustainable,” “green” and “xeric” in our landscape are not practices that should be understood as purely reactive to future population and resource use estimates.

“We know how to see ecological quality only through our cultural lenses, and through those lenses it may or may not look like nature.”

-Joan Iverson Nassauer

The reality is that the landscape we inhabit today is a product of human efficiencies and opportunistic resource use for the benefit of fiscal growth and human sustenance. The constructed city has proved a lab for cycles of economic produc-
tion, a nest for the nurturing of different cultures and a haven of protection from a harsh, semi-arid region that held the name "Great American Desert" for over 50 years after it was settled (Werner et al. 1993). But it has also become a latent garden, an ecological system that has been used and depleted, paved over and ignored. This system was originally reinvented as an artificial ecology back in the height of the mining boom in the 1860s with the intent of marketing the area to potential East Coast newcomers as a spacious and lush oasis of deciduous/semi-deciduous broadleaf forest (Werner et al. 1993). Despite this perpetuated myth, the potentials of this latent garden are exposed every time we see an ecological event take place. Orchestrated by humans or not, these events reveal conditions that encourage flourishing life, vegetation or habitat based on those conditions. In regard to my diligent patch of bromegrass in spring, this event can be understood as part of a stage of succession because it is a response to ecological changes that have disturbed previous conditions (Clements 1916).

Such disturbances have most often been deemed undesirable to our own species. In an effort to protect human habitat from what we consider damage and disaster, such as flood, pest and fire events, we have altered the soil nutrient cycle by eliminating those events which have previously allowed an existing ecological state to be transformed into another. Instead, in our attempt to stage an idealized urban ecology representative of one that cannot be sustained by our climate or resources, we have produced an environment not viable for plant life. This landscape has become an architectural and engineered endeavor for the success of one species, but at the expense of all others.

In many ways, the urban street tree is a measuring stick for this ecological failure in the city. On any given street in downtown Denver, it is more extraordinary to see a tree that is flourishing than it is to see one that is not. When you line street tree up one after another, you don’t notice health, you notice failure. This is how we have defined our urban landscape. We have grown more accustomed to having streets lined with newly planted, 2”caliper trees than streets lined with healthy mature trees, accepting that these crucial plants will survive on average less than ten years (www.nafs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/uf/briefs98/ufassess.htm 2011). If understanding ecological function is necessary for humans to maintain "ecological quality" in their environments, then surely Denver is in need of a new cultural translation of landscape, one that is responsive to the challenges and needs of our difficult urban conditions (Nassauer 1997).

The State of Colorado’s Urban Soils

According to renowned urban street tree expert James Urban, FASLA, “Urban forestry practices have largely relied on tree selection or ‘the right tree in the right place’ as the primary method to overcome more difficult sites. Current research suggests that many urban sites are so severe that no species will reliably work (Perry 1989).” Both soil quality (aerated and nutrient-rich) and soil quantity (capacity for water holding and root growth through the life of the tree) are ingredients for urban tree growth (Acquaah 2005). Historical neighborhoods like LODO may have better chances for urban tree success because of the lesser degree of soil deterioration (grading, compaction, removal of topsoil). Modern building sites (post-1940) generally have gone through a larger number of site modifications as well as a more intensive grading regimen (Urban 1992).

Two hundred years ago the view from the banks of the South Platte River spoke a different story. It was a narrative of time and geology, periodic drought and flooding, winds and fire. A millennium of prairie ecosystem dynamics on Colorado’s Front Range produced a deep, rich earth built over time and cut away by hydro-geologic forces. These soils developed at first from debris blown down from the mountains (Mutel 1992). Over time, the soil of these temperate grasslands became nutrient-rich from "the growth and decay of deep, many-branched grass roots" (www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/exhibits/biomes/grasslands 2011). It was a vast and rich resource for the first generations of farmers to the area, but regular tilling and cattle grazing of the short and tall grass prairie has eliminated the necessary successional processes of frequent, severe disturbances that created a biodiverse and thriving ecosystem (Mutel 1992).

Denver's Next Urban Ecosystem: The Living City Block

The Living City Block in its regional context and placement within downtown Denver. (Image courtesy of Patsy McEntee-Shaffer)

LODO’s Living City Block Project creates a stage for new ideas and strategies for regenerative and resource efficient urban
communities. The one-and-a-half block area located between 15th and 16th and Wynkoop and Wazee/Blake alley is composed of office buildings, retail shops, restaurants, as well as lower- and higher-income housing units. LCB aims to create a “replicable, exportable, scalable and economically viable framework for the resource efficient regeneration of cities” with the goal of making the LoDo project a net-zero block by the year 2014. The organization plans to achieve this by integrating practices that will reduce overall energy use, such as installing solar, wind and geothermal panels. But the project is unique in that it is concurrently pursuing new frameworks for street design to integrate both human and non-human processes into how we think about urban communities.

Such a project opens doors for innovative thinking about the role of urban living systems as components in the energy systems of cities. The reintroduction of successional processes (including disturbance) in urban environments begins to transform the city landscape and is expressed in forms that are often termed as “green infrastructure.” Stormwater gardens, permeable pavement, continuous tree wells and bioswales are strategies that all allow for cycles of ecological process to have a renewed relationship with the urban ground. Areas designated to function for stormwater collection, infiltration and filtering will once again experience disturbance conditions of flooding and wind. Such efforts to decrease impermeable pavement and increase vegetative cover begin to change the soil composition of an area amid a sea of concrete.

Design Intent: Rediscovering the Colorado Front Range Ecology

As you walk the streets of LODO, with their rhythmic storefronts and often irregular, sloping sidewalks, it is easy to mistake the original intent of this lively and now highly desirable neighborhood. The architecture is dominated by turn-of-the-century brick warehouses that were originally designed to be multifunctional due to the changing face of both settlement and industry, even in those early years (Noel 1991). Many of these warehouses - raised from local earthen materials - were used for agricultural storage and distribution. Using this historical narrative as a symbol to drive the streetscape design, the form of the crop row becomes a significant cultural form which shaped both the landscape and the economy of young Denver. This form becomes instrumental in shaping the planting design of the space while framing an understanding of ecological change over time. A migratory seed blows into the city from the South Platte’s riparian corridor and embeds itself in exposed earth. A bunch grass fails among a line of brotherly soldiers, leaving a forlorn gap. Within an orderly system like a crop row, both events mark an inherent desire for non-human systems to wander and misbehave.

“Nature rewards enterprise on a limited scale”
-Wes Jackson

More than 30 years ago, botanist Wes Jackson of California State University-Sacramento developed a theory of perennial polyculture for “nature-based” agriculture. He conceded that humans manipulated the native environment for the creation of efficient systems of food mass-production. But he also recognized the ability for technology to develop horticultural systems that could be productive, efficient and resource sensitive (Jackson 1978). Jackson’s research and work with the Land Institute, the Kansas-based non-profit organization he founded in 1976, is noteworthy because of its relevance and attention to processes of ecological succession and local ecological systems. This perennial polyculture employs knowledge of the biological design of plants with differing life cycles as a way to understand the long term effects of farming annual crops (Jackson 1978).
Similar to the annual species we see pop up in the first stage of primary succession, the monoculture planting of annual grain crops maximize the “weedy” and “enterprising” qualities of these plants that are biologically designed to have abundant biomass without a lot of energy put into root stock. While such annuals are accepted as “productive” in their manipulated form, all lined up and spread across the gentle rises of the Colorado Front Range landscape, this organizational language incorrectly implies efficient resource use. In the city, where highly organized systems are expected to a higher degree, the presence of annuals often breeds contempt for transitional spaces. Those determined and expeditious little suckers that make us notice the imperfect cracks in the pavement and the loose decomposed asphalt in the corner of a parking lot where the last few leaves have not been swept up—they are a silenced narrative of a space in transition.

“Next to nuclear war, the largest environmental problem is soil loss.”

-Wes Jackson

Jackson’s perennial polyculture theory promotes self-renewing and self-regulating prairie ecosystem models for agriculture. He sought to have fields planted in polycultures (more than one plant in a field), utilizing spatial mappings of prairie species relatives to guide each field’s companion planting. Jackson also wanted to use perennials, which would not need to be replanted every year so that soil would be left more intact - preventing erosion - and allowing important relationships between soil and plant to develop (Jackson 1978).

The design for the Wazee Streetscape draws from Jackson’s work as well as research from the University of Florida’s (UFL) School of Forest Resources and Conservation and St. Paul Minnesota’s Greening of the Great River Park Program. UFL’s work acknowledges urban areas as ecosystems that have been deprived of necessary successional processes that can degrade ecosystems beyond recovery without cycles of biodiversity. Instead, researchers advocate for the determination of an “appropriate natural disturbance regime” to reintroduce to urban areas (Binelli et al. 2000). In contrast and grounded in practice, the Greening of the Great River Park Program is a 35-acre project in downtown St. Paul, established in 1995, which utilizes frequent low-intensity fires and grass cutting to maintain the successional stage of the prairie ecosystem (Binelli et al. 2000).

Likewise, the recommended design incorporates plant phasing based on the beneficial ecological exchanges of plant succession over time. The concept uses the current tree-planting zone of a linear five-feet area adjacent to the curb as the active planting area which also functions as an area for stormwater runoff. The design starts with primary succession grass species of the native prairie due to their extremely fibrous and deep roots. The intention here is for these plants to add organics and nutrients to the soil while also aerating it through horticultural processes. The initial phase incorporates mass plantings of grasses
such as Little Bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium), Indiangrass (Sorghastrum nutans) and Switchgrass (Panicum virgatum), which are also used ornamentally in our designed landscapes. These native grasses have a variety of beneficial qualities for use in highly disturbed urban environments with high levels of pollutants and severe microclimate conditions. They are tolerant of both flood and drought so could withstand our brief inundations of rain as well as long periods without precipitation. They are also natural pollutant filters. Trees will be used strategically in the design, from the first phase of planting, though an emphasis will be made on an investment in tree root zone area and quality over the number of trees planted.

The second planting phase adds prairie forbes to the design in places where the grasses have failed. Again, these perennials are plants that are commonly used in ornamental planting design and are valued for their color, form and ability to thrive in our climate.

The third phase adds shrubs and additional trees to the landscape and utilizes the work that previous plantings have done to improve soil conditions on the street. Trees chosen for planting in both phases 1 and 3 will be species selected for their appropriateness in the semi-arid landscape, as well as their tolerance to pollutants and urban conditions. Their placement will be strategic with an emphasis on ameliorating microclimates at pedestrian-frequented areas and optimal success for the plant.

The designed propagation of living systems in the city, landscape architects will continue to be limited to the streetscape design of aesthetic concrete planters and decorative scored cement sidewalks. Lucky for us, we will continue to be reminded that sealing the ground plane does not stifle the bubbling, breathing, pulsating, shifting and burgeoning processes of ecology that exist elusively in urban environments.

REFERENCES
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ROOT is the University of Colorado Denver master of landscape architecture publication. Begun in 2009, it publishes 600 to 800 copies on an annual basis. Further information about ROOT can be found at www.root-land.org.
PUTTING THE WOW IN COLORADO’S PLAY SYSTEMS

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LeadershipINSITE: StudioINSITE announces new office leadership

Celebrating the success of our recent collaborative efforts and our growing reputation as one of the region’s leading design firms, studioINSITE has assembled a creative leadership team, taking the firm to the next level in campus and urban placemaking.

studioINSITE, LLC is pleased to introduce Jim Leggitt, FAIA, architect, planner, author, and visualist as the newest member of the team. Jim joins studioINSITE founder Dennis Rubba, RLA, ASLA as Principal for Design Innovation. The firm has also expanded its leadership team with the promotion of three Associate Principals specializing in Planning, Design and Landscape Architecture.

studioINSITE 2012 Leadership Team:

- Dennis Rubba, RLA, ASLA  Founding Principal
- Jim Leggitt, FAIA   Principal, Design Innovation
- Chris Geddes, AICP   Associate Principal, Planning
- Chris Sutterfield, RLA  Associate Principal, Design
- Kimberly Douglas, RLA, ASLA  Associate Principal, Landscape Architecture

Established in 2001, studioINSITE is a national leader committed to the design of Meaningful and Memorable places. Its services range from master planning to design implementation in the areas of urban streetscapes, districts and communities; mixed-use and commercial developments; multi-family housing; higher education, health care and corporate campuses; and municipal and cultural facilities.

Please contact Megan Jones, Marketing Coordinator, at 303.433.7100 or mjones@studio-insite.com for more information or to request a brochure of our work.

Lednovation Expands the EnhanceLite MR16-35L Landscape Line with Narrow-flood Beam Option

LEDnovation, a preeminent developer of LED lighting and replacement lamp technology, today expanded its EnhanceLite® MR16-35L Landscape line to include a 24° narrow-flood beam angle. This new lamp complements the EnhanceLite® MR16-35L, 11° spot already in production, giving customers greater choice to select the optimal lamp for their application. All MR16-35Ls are designed for comparable replacement to 35 watt halogen lamps.

Designed for use in IP66 rated outdoor fixtures, the EnhanceLite® MR16-35L narrow-flood landscape lamp is of a robust design meant to see harsh environments. The MR16-35L makes it possible to have the same high-quality, energy-efficient LED light available for interior spaces in exterior spaces. The MR16-35L narrow-flood produces light at a color temperature of 3000K.

In describing the new lamp, Israel J. Morejon, CEO and President of LEDnovation, said, “The new narrow-flood EnhanceLite MR16-35L benefits from the same robust design as the MR16-35L spot. We focused on creating a lamp that would meet the safety and long term reliability required for the landscape environment.”

As with all EnhanceLite® LED MR16 products, the new 35 watt-equivalent narrow-flood landscape is a premium quality lamp that represents the very best in solid-state lighting. All versions of the EnhanceLite® MR16-35L are sized for exact fit into any standard MR16 fixture and are compatible with most transformers.

Key Features of the EnhanceLite® MR16-35L Narrow-Flood:

- LEDL-MR16-35-12-30D-INF
- Beam Angle: 24°
- CBCP (cd): 1301
- Lumen Output (lm): 350
- Power Consumption (W): 4.7
- Efficacy (lm/W): 74
- Dimmable to 5% on most dimmers
- Comfortable 3000K color temperature with CRI of 82 - GU 5.3 base
- 35,000 hour life with a 3-year warranty

All LEDnovation lamp models are tested for photometric performance in accredited third-party labs according to IES LM-79 requirements, with reports available online. The EnhanceLiteTM MR16-35L narrow flood will be available in early April 2012.

About LEDnovation - Change without compromise

Offering a full spectrum of LED-based replacement lamps, LEDnovation is leading innovation in the field of solid state lighting. Solid state, or LED lighting generates light from complex semiconductor materials, eliminating much of the wasted energy that has been inherent to electric light-generation for over a century. By combining multi-disciplinary strengths in LEDs, electronic systems, power supplies, thermal and optics design, LEDnovation has succeeded in developing some of the highest efficacy LED replacement lamps available, offering a winning business case and rapid return on investment to commercial clients and property operators. The company is headquartered in Tampa, Florida and manufactures its products in the North America.

For more information, visit http://www.LEDnovation.com
For inquiries email: inquiries@lednovation.com Tel: 813.891.9665
Design Concepts Completes Cutting-Edge Study of Play Infrastructure in Alexandria, Virginia to Prevent Obesity & Encourage Play

Design Concepts of Lafayette, Colorado, an award-winning landscape architecture and planning firm specializing in parks, playgrounds, and schools, recently completed a cutting-edge study of a city’s play places as a system. The study, conducted in Alexandria, Virginia, is unique because it considered the entire environment at locations where children play, not just the play equipment, and used an innovative methodology for measuring levels of service for play spaces citywide. Research has shown that play, including unstructured activity and contact with nature, is important for many reasons, such as physical health and social and intellectual development.

“We are using the assessment study as a springboard to bring awareness about play and address the needs for children ages two to five in Alexandria,” said Carrie Fesperman Redden, MPH, MCRP, health planner for the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, a citizen-led coalition of nonprofit organizations, schools, municipal agencies, local businesses, government and community leaders, and concerned citizens. An assessment report and video that Design Concepts produced are “critical building blocks for building a play movement in Alexandria, drawing attention to the importance of play, and determining how we can improve opportunities for children,” said Fesperman Redden.

The project was funded by a Kaiser Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) grant. The Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network, collaborating with the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, Alexandria Smart Beginnings, the City of Alexandria, and others, hired Design Concepts and team members GreenPlay, LLC of Lafayette, Colorado, and psychologist Helle Burlingame, Ph.D., of Olympia, Washington, to assess Alexandria’s playground infrastructure and the quality, distribution, and accessibility of play spaces for toddlers and preschoolers. A recent health survey of Alexandria, a city of 140,000 located six miles south of downtown...
Washington, D.C., indicated high obesity levels among children. The city has a large proportion of immigrant families and young parents the coalition hopes to reach with information about the importance of play and good places to play. While the focus of the study was on play opportunities for 6,000 young children, it also evaluated play for children of all ages. The coalition also asked the team to propose actions to improve and expand on these opportunities.

The team developed an assessment survey and evaluated 86 public and private playgrounds at parks, schools, churches, public housing developments, and apartment complexes, using geographic information system (GIS) technology and Geo-Referenced Amenities Standards Program (GRASP®) methodology. Developed primarily by Design Concepts and GreenPlay, GRASP® methodology assesses the value of parks and recreation facilities and other infrastructure in communities. In the past 10 years, Design Concepts has conducted GRASP® studies in more than 75 cities in 30 states, including evaluations of how communities provide an environment for active living and health.

The study included an inventory of play spaces, with an evaluation of the functionality of each play space; an analysis of the physical distribution of and access to play spaces across Alexandria; focus groups with daycare providers, family services, and others to determine the community’s needs, values, and priorities for play; a citywide evaluation of the gaps, opportunities, and constraints that affect access to play; and value scores for play spaces, as well as recommendations and strategies for improving access to play spaces for young children. Using a numerical scale developed for the project, each play space was assigned a play space score, which was also used to measure levels of service for play citywide. Parts of the city with lower levels of service were identified and targeted for improvements to play spaces to enhance opportunities for healthy play.

Through the study, “we were able to confirm what everyone suspected about current play spaces, and then quantify what the deficits were,” said Rob Layton, RLA, FASLA, CPRP, the Design Concepts principal in charge of the project. “The advantage of looking at play citywide is that the community doesn’t have to address all needs in all places. A cluster of play spaces in one part of the city that work together can provide a wide range of experiences for the children that live there.”

The study was begun in April 2011 and completed in February, 2012. The study report is available at http://healthieralexandria.org/HealthyLifestyles/content.aspx?id=57274. Design Concepts also produced a video on play to encourage Alexandria parents to take their children to playgrounds every day, and to different places to experience different kinds of play. The video is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDuXZwZIDQM.

Using data and recommendations from the study, the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network launched the Project Play Task Force to raise awareness about the importance of play, improve play environments for Alexandria children, and ensure that every child has access to a high-quality playground. Alexandria's obesity prevention campaign will include outreach such as information sessions and maps showing the location of play places that will be distributed at community centers, schools, PTOS, churches, and preschools.

The City of Alexandria recently was named one of 213 Playful City USA Communities by KaBOOM! for its efforts to increase play opportunities for children. Playful City USA, sponsored by the Humana Foundation, is a national program advocating for local policies that improve children’s play opportunities.

Founded in 1981, Design Concepts CLA, Inc, is a community and landscape architecture firm of 17 professionals that is focused on master planning and design for parks, communities, and school and university campuses throughout the Rocky Mountain Region. Design Concepts' projects have been featured in The Denver Post, Landscape Architecture, and many other regional and national publications. For more information, go to www.dcla.net.

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Institute for transportation & development policy report announces new gold, silver, bronze rating system for world-class bus rapid transit

April 30, 2012, New York City – The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDTP) is releasing The BRT Standard Version 1.0, a new scoring system based on internationally recognized best practice in bus rapid transit (BRT) system design. BRT Standard awards points for benefits such as off-board fare collection, frequency of service, level boarding, safe and comfortable station design, passenger comfort and access, and good integration with cycling and walking. It deducts points for low speeds, overcrowding, poor maintenance of buses or stations, lack of right-of-way enforcement, and too long or too short distances between stations. Similar to the LEED green building ratings, BRT Standard designates gold, silver, and bronze rankings.

BRT, a transit system that combines the quality and efficiency associated with rail travel with the flexibility of buses, has gained significant momentum in the US and internationally. With its relatively short implementation period and typically lower capital costs, municipalities are looking to BRT for solutions to rapid urban growth, ever increasing congestion and rising greenhouse gas emissions. As more cities adopt BRT, it has become ever more important to define an industry standard as a benchmark of project success. Cities are also beginning to use it as a guide to designing the “gold standard” option.

“While over 70 cities have created some form of BRT, many people are simply not aware of their true potential, since there is tremendous variation in the quality of those systems,” says Walter
Hook, CEO of ITDP. “It became clear to us that a standard was needed to recognize the leaders in BRT, and to help those planning new systems.”

BRT Standard Version 1.0 is a culmination of a review by leading international BRT experts and is endorsed by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. 2012 is a pilot year to test the BRT Standard and make modifications as needed. The final BRT Standard will be released and implemented in early 2013. The BRT Standard is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. A free PDF download of the full report is available at www.brtstandard.org.

“BRT Standard will be an incredible tool for urban planners, governments, and NGOs as they seek to plan and improve their transit systems,” says Hook. “The best BRT systems are those that combine efficiency and sustainability with passenger comfort and convenience, and this report clearly lays out how to achieve that. We know how much of a difference a gold standard BRT system can make in quality of life for urban residents and commuters.”

The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy is an international leader in designing and building world-class bus rapid transit systems. ITDP provides technical transport and planning expertise to cities worldwide to bring about transport solutions that cut greenhouse gas emissions, reduce poverty and social inequity, and improve the quality of urban life.

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Three studioINSITE projects honored at the 2012 downtown denver awards dinner

Three of the six projects receiving awards from the Downtown Denver Partnership Awards Dinner on May 30, 2012, were studioINSITE projects.

The 14th Street Redevelopment project establishes an “Ambassador Street” along the critical urban core spanning from Market Street to Colfax Avenue. This award was granted “For completing an extensive streetscape project leveraging a unique public/private partnership to provide a welcoming pedestrian experience and a lasting first impression of the City’s core.”

The Clyfford Still Museum award was granted “For fulfilling the selection of Denver as the beneficiary of the Clyfford Still estate through a museum dedicated solely to his art and legacy, while contributing to the cultural vibrancy and international recognition of Downtown.”

And the DDP award for the History Colorado Center was “For building a state-of-the-art museum on an underutilized block in Downtown Denver, helping preserve and experience Colorado’s history in exciting new ways.”

“We are pleased and honored that these distinctive and challenging projects have been recognized by the Downtown community,” says studioINSITE founder and principal Dennis Rubba. “We appreciate the opportunity for a role in each place-making effort and look forward to the continuing success of each work.”

For more information about these projects, visit the 14th Street Page at www.downtownndenver.com; clyffordstillmuseum.org and www.historycolorado.org.

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News from Design Concepts

Centennial Center Park celebrates grand opening, showing master plan by Design Concepts

(Image courtesy of Design Concepts)

Mayor Cathy Noon, City Council, and more than 300 residents gathered in the Festival Plaza of Centennial Center Park on April 27 to celebrate the Grand Opening of Centennial’s first civic park. Design Concepts of Lafayette, Colorado, an award-winning community and landscape architecture firm specializing in parks, multigenerational play areas, and schools, designed the master plan for the park. The 11-acre park is located next to the Centennial Civic Center on the city’s main east-west artery, Arapahoe Road, between South Revere Parkway and South Vaughn Way.

“Our Centennial Center Park is a gem,” said Mayor Cathy Noon after the event. “Axel Bishop and Design Concepts listened to our community, understood our vision, and designed a remarkable gathering place for the City of Centennial. We all look forward to many years of enjoyment.”
City Councilman Ron Weidmann said that Centennial Center Park “has brought Centennial citizens and others together in one grand spot. It has become a destination park for the region.”

As one of Colorado’s newest cities, incorporated in 2001, Centennial wanted a central gathering place for the community. The city, with 100,000 residents in 28.7 square miles, spans approximately 14 miles east to west and three to four miles north to south, and is shaped like a bow tie. The park is located in the center and brings the east and west sides of the city together, providing easy access to all residents.

“City officials wanted a place people could call home,” said Axel Bishop, ASLA, AICP, CPRP, Design Concepts project principal in charge. “More importantly, they wanted a place where people could gather as a community.” Design Concepts began the master planning process in 2009, when the firm conducted a series of public meetings to determine the community’s preferences for the park’s character and amenities. The Centennial City Council approved the park master plan in 2010, and construction began in January 2011.

The firm’s design for a safe and comfortable environment for all ages called for shaping the land to create overlooks and a more contoured topography. The Butte, the dominant high viewing hill, was formed by soil removed from carving out the grassy amphitheater.

The Festival Plaza, a gathering point in the center of the park, connects the grand entryway, extensive playgrounds, shelters, the butte, amphitheater, and parking. All of the gathering places are close together to allow for socializing with friends and neighbors. The firm used the concept of outdoor rooms radiating out of a hub to provide a variety of experiences and to allow people to be near each other while also having a sense of protection in smaller and more intimate places.

There are several open park-like shelters. The main shelter includes a picnic pavilion with a gas fireplace warming area and comfortable restrooms. A plaza overlook shelter has WiFi and the feel of a coffee house—a place with built-in stone “couches” and skylights, where visitors can commune with each other or their laptop. On top of the “coffee house” shelter is a covered plaza overlook where visitors can keep an eye on children playing below and take in the skyline views of the park and the mountains to the west.

The playground complex itself is sunken, surrounded by walls and trees, and feels protected—parents and other caregivers can see everyone. Other areas for active play include climbing walls (one features a map of Colorado), a state-of-the-art rocks and ropes course, a spray park, a sledding hill, a meadow, and a drainage area with stepping stones crossing a natural wetlands.

The park’s custom design is intended to convey the passage of time, which is articulated through the nautilus shape of the central playground complex and the integration of arches, spirals, and curves in the park’s structures. Among the park’s educational elements, the main plaza showcases the historic timeline of the Cherry Creek Basin, including fun facts and a map of the Cherry Creek Watershed. The amphitheater’s design incorporates elements that represent the four periods of human history: Lithic, Archaic, Formative, and Classic.

There are multiple walking loops of varying lengths. The Colorado Statehood Walk displays interesting facts about Colorado, and the Viewfinder Walk provides an interactive trivia challenge, taking visitors on a quest through the park and highlighting viewpoints within and outside of the park boundaries.

“I can’t say enough about the level of detail Design Concepts put into their design,” said Laura Prendergast, project manager with Turner Construction Company of Denver. “We were excited to work with them again.” SlaterPaul Architects of Denver created comfortable, modern, and iconic architecture, and the Merrick & Company engineering firm of Aurora designed an innovative drainage system that became part of the park’s play and educational features.

Founded in 1981, Design Concepts CLA, Inc, is a community and landscape architecture firm of 17 professionals that is focused on master planning and design for parks, communities, and school and university campuses throughout the Rocky Mountain Region. Design Concepts’ projects have been featured in The Denver Post, Landscape Architecture, and many other regional and national publications. For more information, go to www.dcla.net.

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