

Brownfields Success Story

Housing and the Arts at Lamar Street Station Lakewood, Colorado

Just 15 minutes outside downtown Denver, a renaissance is underway. The pioneering spirit that once drove early settlers to explore the western frontier is now emboldening a rebirth in the Two Creeks neighborhood of Lakewood. Where abandoned buildings and contaminated properties once sat idle, today a transit-oriented arts district and a brand-new residential development have taken root.

At 1560 Teller Street, the nonprofit 40 West Arts now anchors a state-designated creative district working to stimulate the local economy through the arts and cultural activities. And at 6150 W. 13th Avenue, just half a block from the Lamar Street light rail station, the new Lamar Station Crossing offers 110 sustainably designed housing units, including live-work studios.

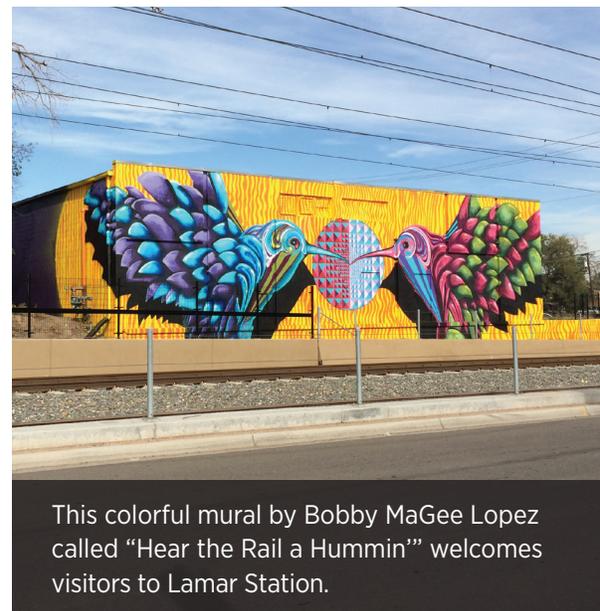
Located along West Colfax Avenue, a historically critical artery in the region, and the West Rail Line, these two new developments at the historic heart of Lakewood are helping this community reemerge after decades of economic challenges.

The Opportunity

In 2004, Colorado voters approved a plan to increase transit services in the Denver metropolitan region. Known as FasTracks, the plan authorized the westward expansion of light rail service. The new West Rail Line, completed in 2013, added 12 miles of rail from Denver's Union Station through Lakewood and beyond to Golden.

"Once FasTracks passed and we saw that they'd be repurposing the old railroad right-of-way, our development director began looking at land along the corridor," says Ryan McCaw, sustainability and grant programs manager at Metro West Housing Solutions, developer of Lamar Station Crossing.

The company identified a roughly 6-acre unused parcel with a history of agricultural, residential and commercial uses. "We bought the property in 2006 and demolished the old buildings on the site in 2007," McCaw says. "The project started gaining steam from there."



This colorful mural by Bobby MaGee Lopez called "Hear the Rail a Hummin'" welcomes visitors to Lamar Station.

Photo credit: Alexis Moore.

EPA Grant Recipient:

City of Lakewood
Metro West Housing Solutions

Grant Type:

EPA Brownfield Cleanup Grant
EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant

Former Uses:

Housing, light manufacturing,
automobile impound, office and
storage

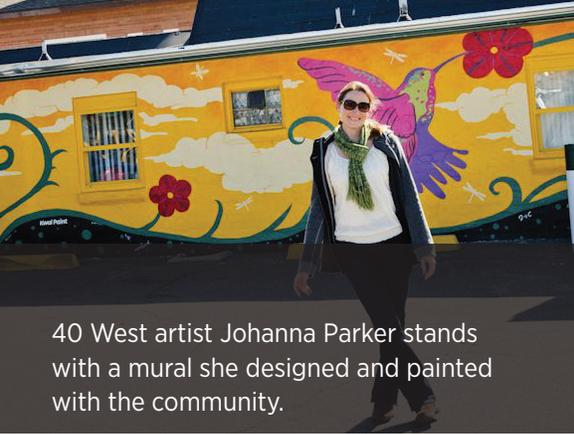
Current Uses:

Lamar Station Crossing and
40 West Arts District



The new apartments at Lamar Station Crossing provide easy access to the light rail station.

Photo credit: Paul Brokering.

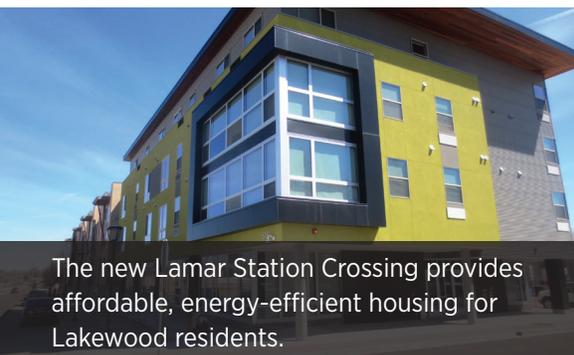


40 West artist Johanna Parker stands with a mural she designed and painted with the community.

Photo credit: JP d'Andrimont.

“ It’s a real success story when looking at the area’s needs and how together these projects are making a huge impact on the community and are transforming the area. ”

*William Rothenmeyer
Brownfields Project Manager
EPA Region 8*



The new Lamar Station Crossing provides affordable, energy-efficient housing for Lakewood residents.

Photo credit: Ryan McCaw.

Meanwhile, the City of Lakewood too was preparing for the arrival of light rail. City and community leaders recognized the need for higher density residential and commercial development near the new rail stations. Plans and flexible zoning regulations were developed with community input and were adopted by the city for the station areas. The Lamar Station Area Plan specifically called for land uses that include residential, live-work, limited office, neighborhood-serving retail, as well as art, dance and music studios.

“With the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design and some creative businesses already nearby, we knew this would be a fantastic area for the arts,” says Alexis Moore, associate planner with the Lakewood Planning Department.

Birth of an Arts District

A number of vacant buildings in the Two Creeks area already were being adaptively reused for art when, in 2010, the city used a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to explore developing an arts district in the neighborhood. The grant enabled the city to hire a consultant to conduct public outreach and develop a plan for the district.

The city’s planning department appointed a task force consisting of residents, local businesses and representatives from the college and the city council and planning office. The task force held planning workshops and hosted open houses to solicit community input. These efforts culminated in the 40 West Arts District Urban Design and Mobility Concepts plan, adopted by the city in 2012. The plan recommended improvements for pedestrian and bicycle mobility, public art and an arts loop. The effort also spurred formation of the nonprofit 40 West Arts, which oversees management of the arts district.

According to Moore, “the EPA money helped solidify the vision and spur grassroots efforts,” including formation of 40 West Arts, which is headquartered in a building that was vacant for years. A feather in the cap for everyone’s efforts, in 2014, just 2 years after its inception, the 40 West Arts district was designated a Certified Creative District by the state, providing 40 West Arts with access to grants and statewide marketing and social media opportunities.

Building Lamar Station Crossing

While the city was investigating the feasibility of creating an arts district, Metro West Housing Solutions kicked off an outreach campaign of its own to better understand the neighborhood’s housing needs. “The community expressed concern about our initial plan to make 100 percent of the units low income,” McCaw says, “so we made 20 percent of the units market rate. We also started looking at the idea of offering live-work units to help the arts district get going.”

Before Metro West Housing Solutions could get its plans for Lamar Station Crossing off the ground, however, environmental contamination on the site had to be addressed. Over the years, homes on the property had been demolished and buried there, leaving behind asbestos-containing materials. Later periods of light manufacturing and automobile impounding had released petroleum and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons into the soil.

Through a cooperative agreement with Metro West Housing Solutions, EPA provided a \$189,000 Brownfield Cleanup Grant for the site remediation. Cleanup took place between August and November 2012, with 2.36 acres ultimately remediated and a total of 4,200 cubic yards of contaminated soil excavated and hauled away from the site. Construction began shortly thereafter, and the residential units opened for business in late 2013.

Not only does the Lamar Station Crossing fill a need for affordable housing in the area, but it also contains a variety of features that make it a leader in advancing sustainability. Both the site and the building have earned certification through the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design program. "The big thing was energy-efficient appliances, windows—the whole building envelope was designed to be as efficient as possible," McCaw says. "There's also a 78-kilowatt photovoltaic solar array. The cost of energy is 45 percent lower than for comparable buildings built to code in that timeframe."

Other sustainability-minded features include a pedestrian bridge built over a drainage way, providing access to a new Head Start center and connection to the nearby multimodal transportation network. The Lamar Station light rail platform is a few hundred feet away, as are bus stops and a bike trail.

The Benefits

The new housing development resulted in cleanup of an abandoned site where contamination was impeding reuse. "It's an infill urban area development instead of building on the rural fringe," says William Rothenmeyer, a brownfields project manager with EPA Region 8. Because of the transit-oriented development, residents can choose to drive less, walk to transit or bicycle to get around. So far, only 80 percent of the available parking spaces are accounted for. The project also created about 100 jobs during construction and 4.5 full-time equivalent permanent positions to staff the complex.

Although the arts district and Lamar Station Crossing emerged independently, the projects have had synergistic support for one another. The Artist in Residence Program at Lamar Station Crossing, sponsored by 40 West Arts and the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design, "has been a huge success," Moore says, "and delivers creative and engaging arts programming for adults and children. Many 40 West member artists also live in the development. And there's an amazing community room that hosts arts-related functions. It's been a really positive win-win."

McCaw agrees. "We were hoping to get at least one artist to move in," he says. "Now we have five live-work units filled with artists. The property is even more modern and eclectic than we initially planned."

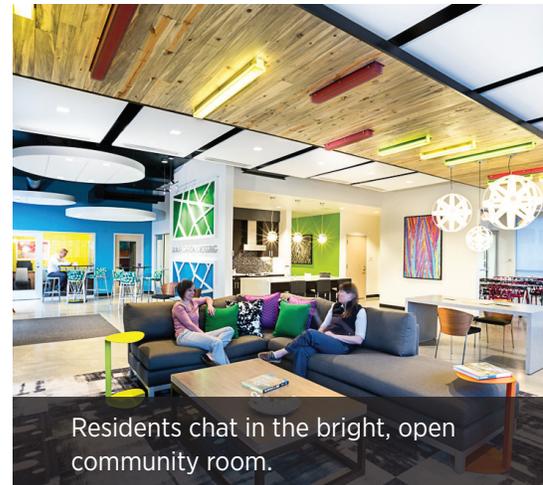
Both projects also appear to be bringing economic development opportunities to the area. According to data collected by the Lakewood-West Colfax Business Improvement District and Lakewood Planning Department, the number of creative enterprises in the neighborhood grew nearly 100% from 36 in 2012 to 71 in 2014. Jobs in the creative sector too have mushroomed over the same period from 199 to 288.

Moore points to the grassroots support as critical to the success achieved to date in the 40 West Arts district. "Because we had those individuals in the community championing the plan and creating the nonprofit organization, we were able to come so far in such a short amount of time," she says. "It was an amazingly collaborative process."



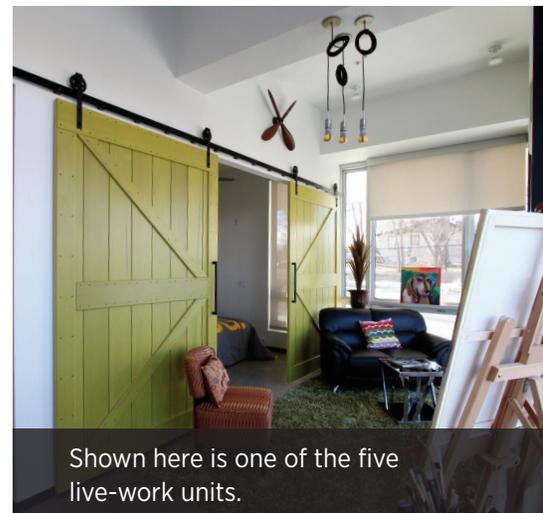
This pedestrian bridge connects Lamar Station Crossing to the Head Start center.

Photo credit: William Rothenmeyer.



Residents chat in the bright, open community room.

Photo credit: Paul Brokering.



Shown here is one of the five live-work units.

Photo credit: Renae Pick.

For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact William Rothenmeyer at (303) 312-6045 or rothenmeyer.william@epa.gov.