



A Golden Opportunity

Olde Town Arvada adds to its retail repertoire

Transit-oriented development in Olde Town Arvada has brought new mixed-use developments and plans for many more, but completion of RTD's Gold Line is still many years away.

By Dan DeCristoforo

Grandview Plaza and Reno Place form a striking gateway to Arvada's Olde Town at Old Wadsworth and Grandview Avenue, where the views of Denver's skyline and the mountains are indeed grand.

The icons of Arvada's decades-long urban renewal efforts also are harbingers of future transit-oriented development in the area. With completion of the Gold Line commuter rail still six years off and financing for it not yet a sure thing, Arvada has nonetheless prepared for its arrival, revitalizing the downtown core by erecting new buildings and rehabilitating old ones.

New pedestrian-friendly amenities include wide sidewalks clad with brick pavers, landscaped plazas, shade trees, street lamps, seating and a host of businesses for eating, drinking, shopping or just hanging out.

Evoking History

Even without the train, Olde Town Arvada is reaping dividends with small businesses taking root and a new library drawing in 40,000 visitors a year. The Gold Line is projected to draw another 100,000 visitors annually.

Located just steps from the future rail station, Grandview (two buildings oriented east-west along Grandview Avenue) and Reno are sensitively proportioned, two-story, brick-clad buildings boasting handsome sandstone cornices, steel beams and storefront-style windows. The expansive glazing wraps the corner building of Grandview Plaza on all four sides.



Grandview, one of two new buildings along Grandview Avenue, is two stories and brick clad with sandstone cornices, steel beams and storefront-style windows. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)

Both projects were developed simultaneously by Landon Enterprises of Denver, designed by Intergroup Architects of Littleton and built by Starker Construction of Denver. Grandview Plaza won a Bronze Hard Hat Award for Outstanding Private Project from Colorado Construction magazine.

"Architectural details include glass-block and brick accents and contemporary-looking steel and glass canopies that echo Victorian-era awnings," says Bud Starker, president of Starker Construction. "Ornamental-steel detailing, fenestrations and a variety of charming sconces highlight all three buildings. Our objective was to evoke the historic character of downtown without mimicking it."

Strong Tenant Buy-in

Grandview's west building resembles a row of five distinct structures built at different times. Facades clad in red brick, yellow brick and buff-colored sandstone vary in height, and cornice styles and window treatments include bays, sash windows and vertical glazing reminiscent of lofts. The facades are repeated on the rear of the buildings.

"Project cost was \$8.9 million: \$6 million for Grandview Plaza and \$2.9 million for Reno Place. Each offers ground-floor retail and second-floor offices, with the Old Wadsworth and Grandview corners reserved for restaurants," says Dick Landon, president of Landon Enterprises.

"We blended old and new, keeping the buildings as historic looking as possible, but we introduced modern technology and architectural details that would appeal to a broad spectrum of prospective tenants. High ceilings, 14 ft on both floors, >>



Grandview's west building resembles a row of five distinct structures built at different times. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)

Arvada Banking on Gold Line

Arvada's comprehensive plan envisions "a vibrant, 18-hour downtown" drawing people from throughout the region to "shop, dine, work, play and learn."

Key to that vision is the arrival of the FasTracks Gold Line in 2015, expected to transform Olde Town Arvada into a popular regional destination and shift the retail mix toward boutiques akin to Boulder's Pearl Street Mall or Denver's Old South Gaylord and South Pearl Street neighborhoods.

"Olde Town has a lot of good things going for it, the historic fabric and old buildings that we don't want to disturb," says Kevin Nichols, senior planner with the Arvada Planning Department. "But opportunities exist to develop mixed-use, higher-density projects consistent with the historic character."

In New Town, south of the train tracks and home to large-format retail and a 14-screen multiplex theater, Arvada wants higher-density, mixed-use development with up to 2,000 units of multifamily residential.

New Town's lower elevation can handle slightly taller structures without impacting views. "Olde Town is suitable for two- and three-story buildings," says Mike Elms, community development director. "There might be a couple of spots where you could do four. South of the tracks, because of the grade difference, you could go as high as six."

A citizens' advisory committee has proposed a historic motif for the rail station that reflects period architecture and echoes the town's original train depot. Proposed design elements include a gabled roof complemented by wood trusses and bracing.



The design team blended old and new throughout the project to keep the buildings looking as historic as possible while introducing modern technology and striking architectural details. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)

provide expansive, brightly lit spaces. Access is excellent within and around the buildings.

Landon adds that a breezeway through the center of the west building provides pedestrian access to 100 parking spaces at the rear and a public plaza intended for restaurants, sandwich shops and open-air dining links the two buildings.

Leasing is currently at 70% overall, with office space 100% filled. If pending deals for upscale restaurants at Grandview



The Arvada Library's restoration completed in 2006, which set the foundation for the redevelopment of the Grandview and Reno buildings along Grandview Avenue. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)

and Reno close, occupancy would jump to 98%.

"That would leave one 1500-sq-ft space empty, but we have a party seriously interested in that," Landon says.

Ready to Grow

Landon has been active in the Denver area for 35 years, but this was the company's first project in Arvada. "Opportunities to build on these kinds of prominent corners don't come

Gold Line Commuter Rail Mandate Won't Negatively Impact Arvada

The 11.2-mile Gold Line between downtown Denver and Arvada-Wheat Ridge is the next segment of FasTracks scheduled to be built after the West Line to Golden. The Gold Line, which includes three Arvada stations—Sheridan, Olde Town and Kipling—has undergone significant changes since inception.

For one, it is now financially bundled with the East Line, which will run from downtown Denver to DIA by way of the Anschutz Medical Campus. "Although the lines remain separate projects, they will be built concurrently under a public-private partnership, just one of three such pilot programs in the country," says Liz Telford, project manager for RTD.

The partnership will be charged with financing, designing, engineering, building, operating and maintaining the two lines. "Three teams are vying for the contract, with construction expected to start in 2011 and take four years," Telford says.

In another change, the Gold Line will be electrified commuter rail instead of light rail, as originally planned. "The change was adopted after a fatal collision in Glendale, Calif., involving a commuter rail train and a freight train," says Ashland Vaughn, RTD project engineer. In the wake of the collision, in which 11 people died, the railroads decided that passenger trains sharing a railroad's right-of-way must be the larger, heavier commuter rail, Vaughn says.

Surprisingly, the cost difference between light rail and commuter rail is "insignificant," Vaughn says. "Commuter rail is

heavier and the track is more expensive, but the platforms and electric system cost less," he says. "Powered by AC rather than DC, commuter rail requires fewer power substations. Trains are just 3 ft higher and 2 ft wider than light rail, so the dynamic envelope isn't significantly larger."

Total project cost for the two lines and a maintenance facility is estimated to be \$2 billion. RTD is currently pursuing \$1 billion in federal funds to help pay for the project. The price tag for the Gold Line itself is expected to be \$600 million in year-of-expenditure dollars. Projected ridership for 2030 based on DRCOG estimates is 20,100 one-way riders per day.

"Arvada's share of the cost is \$5.1 million, but a portion of that can come from permit-fee waivers and in-kind-time contributions such as plan reviews," says Arvada senior planner Kevin Nichols.

In the 1.6-mile stretch between Ralston Road and Carr Street, just one track will be laid due to a narrowing of the railroad right-of-way.

The Gold and East lines have cleared the first hurdle in the three-step FTA funding process: approval of preliminary engineering. Approval of final design and the full-funding agreement should happen by year's end, along with the release of the final environmental impact statement.

Responses to the final RFP, which was released in May, are required by November. Notice to proceed is expected by summer 2010.

along every day," he says. "It's an excellent location, but like any place, it can take time to mature. With infrastructure already in place and activity on the streets, Arvada is bound to catch fire."

Total square footage is 38,500: 25,000 sq ft in Grandview, the remainder in Reno Place. "We began design 2005, broke ground in fall 2006 and finished in late fall 2007," Starker says. "Reno Place had zero lot lines, so we staged it from the Grandview site and then started the west building at Grandview."

Poured-in-place, concrete-slab foundations support steel-frame superstructures infilled with light-gauge steel. The intermediate floor is constructed of metal decking atop bar joists.

"Foundation projections from historic buildings adjacent to the Reno site required grade bridging so as not to disturb the structures," Starker says. "Meanwhile, at Grandview, construction was interrupted when six large storage tanks, relics of a former fuel depot, were unearthed during excavation and had to be removed. Subsequent discovery of a 42-in. water conduit cutting diagonally across the site forced us to build around it."

Related developments include the library and adjacent plaza, completed in 2006, and Water Tower Residential Village, which replaced run-down apartment buildings with an ec-



The new library was built to accommodate approximately 40,000 monthly patrons. Site redevelopment included a new parking lot with 65 spaces. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)

tic but cohesive mix of upscale and affordable condos, apartments, townhomes, lofts and retail.

Meanwhile, an adaptive-reuse project across from the library converted the historic, two-story brick Webster Building into modern office space for an engineering firm. <<<



Updates to the plaza adjacent to the library were completed in 2006 to complement an adaptive reuse on Webster Street, the historic, two-story Webster Building. (Photo courtesy of the city of Arvada)