



RENEWING 38TH AVE

WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO

A Case Study of a Coalition Fostering A Healthier Environment

BACKGROUND

LiveWell Wheat Ridge (LWWR), formerly named Thriving Wheat Ridge, was established in 2005 with a Thriving Communities grant from Kaiser Permanente. The mission was to advance healthy eating and active living (HEAL) through programming, policy and environmental changes that support a healthy food system, and a pedestrian and bicycle friendly community. In 2008, Thriving Wheat Ridge joined the newly formed nonprofit LiveWell Colorado, gaining the name LiveWell Wheat Ridge.

In 2012, LWWR stepped into the advanced implementation stage of the LiveWell Colorado Community Investment initiative. This set the stage for LWWR to develop active community coalitions and influence key changes to critical policies and plans. While funding for LWWR ended in 2014, the momentum created in the last few years will support continued implementation of HEAL policies, programs and environments for years to come.

HISTORY OF 38TH AVENUE

As a suburban community with agricultural roots, Wheat Ridge has lacked a distinct downtown area. With a desire to create a vibrant community space that supports local businesses and residents, the city has been working for many years to transform 38th Avenue, between Wadsworth and Sheridan Boulevards, into the Main Street of Wheat Ridge. Known as Ridge at 38, this mile and a half of 38th Avenue is increasingly recognized within Wheat Ridge and across the Denver metropolitan area as an up-and-coming district of unique local businesses.

The eastern portion, near Sheridan Boulevard, underwent major streetscape and roadway improvements over a decade ago that support a largely automobile-oriented shopping district. In more recent years, the western portion, near Wadsworth Boulevard, has gained attention as an area ripe for redevelopment into a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly Main Street district.



“Thirty-eighth Avenue was a way for people to *drive through* Wheat Ridge. We need to give them a reason to *drive to* Wheat Ridge.”

Britta Fisher
Executive Director
Wheat Ridge 2020

“If you have a safer environment [along 38th Avenue], they will come out and use it.”

Steve Nguyen
Engineering Manager
City of Wheat Ridge

ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Four elements have been key to the momentum behind the revitalization of 38th Avenue in Wheat Ridge: Skilled Organizational Capacity, Strategic Policy Change, Continuous Relationship Building, and Successful Infrastructure Change. These key elements have worked synergistically and have reinforced each other.

Skilled Organizational Capacity

A few crucial organizations have given structure and channeled resources toward efforts to revitalize 38th Avenue. Through strategic citizen empowerment and engagement, these organizations have been able to consistently remind policymakers of the important opportunities for improving 38th Avenue.

LiveWell Wheat Ridge provided funding at varying levels, community stakeholder education, and land use planning documents and policies. Jefferson County Public Health, as fiscal agent, brought expertise in population-level interventions, county and national best practices, and community engagement. Together they worked to support the inclusion of health language in the 2009 Envision Wheat Ridge Comprehensive Plan.

Wheat Ridge 2020 has hosted events through their Live Local Active program. These fun events have drawn citizens out to enjoy public space, built a sense of community, and empowered citizens to be more involved in local decision making.

Strategic, Multi-Layered and Comprehensive Policy Change

The City of Wheat Ridge has been proactive in establishing policies that will thoughtfully guide the redevelopment of 38th Avenue for years to come. The Mixed Use Zoning Code Amendments, 38th Avenue Corridor Plan, and Envision Wheat Ridge Comprehensive Plan helped set the stage for citizens and developers to cast new interest in 38th Avenue. Younger families have moved to Wheat Ridge, and businesses and real estate developers have begun investing in the corridor in anticipation of the transformations set in motion by these policy changes.

City of Wheat Ridge staff, elected and appointed officials have been key partners in the development of these policies and regulations that have made the redevelopment of 38th Avenue possible. Their many hours studying the corridor, speaking with residents and business owners, and encouraging revitalization has led to very thoughtful policies, such as the 38th Avenue Corridor Plan.

Continuous Relationship Building

Much of the momentum behind the transformation of 38th Avenue comes from involved citizens. They are a consistent voice, speaking out for the appearance, economic vitality and reputation of Wheat Ridge. This public involvement has been developed through events like Live Local Active's walking, biking and yoga, and organizations such as the Active Transportation Advisory Team. These activities have brought residents out to enjoy their public spaces, and many have then become active advocates for continuing to improve those places.

Successful Infrastructure Change

The streetscape along 38th Avenue, between Upham and Depew Streets, was changed dramatically in the summer of 2012. Through this restriping test project, the area gained parking, bike lanes, restaurant outdoor seating and planter amenities, and reconfigured four driving lanes to three, creating a slower, more "Main Street" environment that fosters a more walkable community. This retrofit of the roadway has served as an important demonstration of how the corridor could be transformed, and as a test ground for how well these different changes work in the corridor.

SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES

2009

Adoption of [Envision Wheat Ridge Comprehensive Plan](#)

Adoption of [Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan](#)

Passage of the [Mixed Use Zoning Code Amendment Ordinance](#)

Formation of the Active Community Environments (ACE) Taskforce

Adoption of the [Architectural and Site Design Manual](#)

Adoption of the [Streetscape Design Manual](#)

Adoption of the [38th Avenue Corridor Plan](#)

Completion of community-led walking assessments

Institution by the city of annual bicycle and pedestrian counts

Formation of [Live Local Active](#)

Installation of temporary amenity zones and roadway restriping

Rezoning of corridor to Mixed Use-Neighborhood

Reorganization of ACE Taskforce as Active Transportation Advisory Team (ATAT)

Completion of [Conceptual Streetscape Design](#)

2014

MOVING FORWARD

Though LiveWell Wheat Ridge will no longer receive funding from LiveWell Colorado, the momentum behind 38th Avenue will keep going. Here are key recommendations to ensure it continues:

Full Implementation of Permanent Corridor Improvements

It is important that the corridor redevelopment plans are fully implemented. Great momentum has already been generated on 38th Avenue with the temporary amenity zones and roadway restriping. Businesses and residents have invested money and time in the city because they see the great potential for a Main Street Wheat Ridge. Plenty of data has been collected and solid policies have been put in place to ensure that future development fits the character and goals of the city. Now is the time to find resources to make 38th Avenue into a vibrant and appealing district.

Make the Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements Part of a Regional Network

Thirty-eighth Avenue will be most successful when it is easily accessed by a variety of transportation choices. The walkable and bikeable environment envisioned for 38th Avenue is a distinct feature that is a major part of the corridor's appeal. These pedestrian-friendly developments are in high demand among young and old alike, and can command significant real estate price premiums. But they are most useful and appealing when they are part of a larger network of neighborhoods and nearby cities that are safely and easily accessed by foot and by bike. The bicycle lane on Pierce Street is a great start that should be continued in all directions.

Remove Policy Barriers to Economic Development

The inclusion of height and density restrictions in the city charter presents barriers to making effective land use decisions. Concerns about overdevelopment and obstruction of mountain views can be appropriately handled through planning and zoning tools. By removing the restrictions, the city would be better able to keep up with evolving urban planning best practices that support dense, active, multimodal environments. These developments are in high demand, and if they were allowed by the city charter, could be done in ways appropriate to the character of Wheat Ridge.

Support Public Art Along the Corridor

Additional artwork, both publicly-sanctioned and unofficial installations, would create a sense of place, and may entice visitors to stay longer in the district. Art installations in vacant lots and other underutilized spaces can help draw people along the corridor as an attractive and interesting element of the streetscape. The creation of public art is also an opportunity for community-building, with youth and community groups participating in the creative process. Many cities have fostered a sense of community and civic pride through events in which citizens comes together to create public murals and similar large art projects, Wheat Ridge can do the same.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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