



COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

NEWSLETTER

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Colfax, RiNo, LoDo

How BIDs, DDAs, and URAs shape Denver's key corridors

By Denise White, CML engagement & communications manager

Downtown Colorado, Inc. (DCI) and Colorado Municipal League (CML) presented an insightful tour Aug. 22 that delved into the transformative impact of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Downtown Development Authorities (DDAs), and Urban Renewal Areas (URAs) on Denver's urban landscape. The event provided a unique opportunity for Colorado communities to explore how these tools can be leveraged to achieve their own downtown development goals through effective public-private partnerships.

The day began at the historic Emerson School, a 140-year-old building recently renovated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The renovation focused on preserving the building's architectural integrity while adapting it for modern use. The building, now in its "third life," serves as a community hub for several nonprofits.

The tour continued down Colfax Avenue. A representative of the Colfax Avenue BID highlighted its efforts to revitalize this historic yet complex corridor. The district provides placemaking services, maintains the area, and manages the delicate balance between existing residents and new development. Tour participants also learned about the planned Bus Rapid Transit



PHOTO BY DENISE WHITE

A mobile tour hosted by Downtown Colorado, Inc. and Colorado Municipal League visits RiNo ArtPark. The tour highlighted the impact of public-private partnerships in Denver.

improvements, which are expected to further revitalize the area.

A key stop on the tour was the Lowenstein Theater, a redevelopment project made possible through urban renewal efforts. Representatives of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority shared the story behind the theater's transforma-

tion into a cultural hub that includes the Sie Film Center and the Tattered Cover Bookstore. Highlights of the discussion included the complexities of redeveloping historic sites, from navigating landmark restrictions to securing financing

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CML STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

This month, Colorado Municipal League is celebrating a pair of staff anniversaries. Marketing and Communication Specialist Kharyl Jackson and Municipal Research Analyst Rachel Woolworth joined CML one year ago. Congratulations, Kharyl and Rachel!

CML EVENTS

FALL DISTRICT MEETINGS

CML staff will travel around the state in the month of September to meet our municipal members face-to-face at Fall District Meetings. The meetings kick-off with a social hour, providing a perfect opportunity for networking and engaging with other CML members in the area, followed by a dinner and business meeting. These gatherings are also a wonderful opportunity for one-on-one interactions with CML staff. We want to hear about the issues that matter most to you and your community. Register at cml.org/home/networking-events.

ANNUAL SEMINAR ON MUNICIPAL LAW

Mark your calendars! CML's Annual Seminar on Municipal Law provides expert Colorado-specific information directly relevant to the daily practice of municipal attorneys, as well as opportunities to network with peers. The seminar will take place Sept. 20-21 in Colorado Springs. Register by visiting tinyurl.com/CMLAttorneySeminar.

CML WEBINAR: 2024 REGULATED MARIJUANA PROGRAM UPDATES

Sept. 26, noon-1:15 p.m.

The Marijuana Enforcement Division (MED) will present updates related to 2023 and 2024 legislative changes, MED rule changes, and ongoing MED initiatives to identify regulatory efficiency measures and streamlined processes. This presentation will also include 2024 rule updates driven by Senate Bill 24-076, which impacted licensing processes, social equity eligibility criteria, fees, and transfers of genetic materials, among other topics. A summary of 2024 legislation is available on the division's website, and information about the ongoing rulemaking process can be found on the MED Rulemaking Webpage. This free webinar has been approved for CLE credits. Register at tinyurl.com/y32mvae9.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

LAND USE, ZONING, AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Tuesday, Oct. 1, 9 a.m. to noon, at Red Rocks Community College's Arvada Campus

Presented by the Colorado Agency for Recovery Residences, this fair housing training is specifically designed for municipalities to understand their legal obligations as they apply to housing for individuals with disabilities, including recovery residences. Topics will include a legal overview of the fair housing legal protections for individuals with disabilities, municipal land use and zoning compliance with the fair housing anti-discrimination protections, and the fair housing reasonable accommodation legal obligations of municipalities. Register by visiting tinyurl.com/kzc49a8d.

RESEARCH CORNER

Municipalities experiment with nontraditional workweek

Data visualization by **RACHEL WOOLWORTH**, CML municipal research analyst,
and **ALEX MILLER**, CML publication & design specialist

Local governments across Colorado are trying out nontraditional work schedules to improve employee recruitment, retention, and wellbeing. The majority of the state’s school districts, such as Alamosa and Wiggins, utilize a four-day school schedule and various county governments, including Clear Creek and Jefferson, are closed to the public on Fridays to support a four-day workweek for employees. From four 10-hour days to 32-hour workweeks, Colorado municipalities are experimenting with nontraditional work schedules (the following chart is not comprehensive).

| WORK SCHEDULE | OFFICES OPEN | MUNICIPALITY |
|--|--------------------|--|
| Four 10-hour days | Monday-Thursday | Bennett, Berthoud, Black Hawk, Cedaredge, Dove Creek, Hugo, Kiowa, La Jara, Lochbuie, Olathe, Rico, Rockvale, Silt |
| Four 10-hour days | Tuesday-Friday | Blue River |
| The option to work four 10-hour days, staggered shifts | Monday-Friday | Fountain, New Castle, Westminster |
| The option to work four 10-hour days | Monday-Thursday | Crawford, Glenwood Springs, Salida |
| Four nine-hour days and one four-hour day | Monday-noon Friday | Breckenridge, Frisco, Steamboat Springs |
| Seasonal schedule: four 10-hour days April-September, and five eight-hour days October-March | Seasonal | Rangely |
| Piloting a 32-hour workweek (paid for 40 hours), with staggered shifts | Monday-Friday | Golden |

PROS & CONS

Municipalities shared pros and cons of four-day workweeks and other nontraditional schedules.



Pros

- Great recruitment tool
- Improved employee wellbeing (e.g., increased morale, decreased burnout, fewer sick days)
- Access to municipal offices outside of traditional working hours (e.g., early mornings and evenings)
- Budget savings (e.g., less overtime pay, lower utility bills)



Cons

- Increased complexity of employee scheduling
- Full-day closures of municipal offices (usually Fridays)
- Occasional resident dissatisfaction

Historic gymnasium in Buena Vista is being restored

By Rachel Woolworth, CML municipal research analyst, and Richard Mylott, EPA public affairs specialist

McGinnis Gymnasium, a historic gymnasium in the Town of Buena Vista, will soon reopen to the public after sitting vacant for decades. The building, which was once utilized as a recreational, educational, and performing arts center, was vacated in 2008 because of the identification of hazardous materials, including asbestos, lead-based paint, mercury, and mold.

“We would walk by this building every day and see a crumbling structure that clearly needed a lot of work but also had this wonderful location right on Main Street and the elementary school campus,” said Katy Welter, co-founder of Watershed Inc., a preservation-focused nonprofit founded by Buena Vista locals.

Welter and the nonprofit’s other co-founders, Rick Bieterman and John O’Brien, bought the gymnasium from the Buena Vista School District for one dollar. With the purchase, Watershed asked the district to pledge \$1 million to the project — the same amount the district would have spent to demolish it.

The nonprofit also leveraged federal, state, and local dollars to cover costs. The project was awarded an almost \$1 million Brownfields Cleanup Grant from U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), \$250,000 from the State Historical Fund, \$15,000 from the Town of Buena Vista, state preservation tax credits, and more.

“I’m glad to see federal funds coming to cleanup efforts, which will help our communities thrive. The McGinnis Gymnasium holds a rich historical significance in Buena Vista, and this award ensures it will continue to serve the next generation in Chaffee County,” said U.S. Rep. Brittany Pettersen.

The gym, which will reopen to the public in October with the school district as its



McGinnis Gymnasium, seen here prior to its renovation, will reopen to the public in October. Buena Vista received more than a million dollars in grant money to refurbish the building for use as a space for elementary school programming and community arts and recreation programs.

CELEBRATE WITH CML

CML wants to hear about your community’s success. Tell us about a grant you’ve won, water tank that’s finally finished, or anything else you’re excited about. Send an email to CML Publication & Design Specialist Alex Miller, amiller@cml.org, to have your community’s news featured in the CML Newsletter.

exclusive tenant, will be used as a space for elementary school programming, including indoor recess during inclement weather. The school district will license use of the gymnasium to the town’s recreation department, among other users, for indoor recreation classes, arts programming, and more.

“The McGinnis Gym project, which is taking a structure back to its historic use, will help increase facility capacity for our schools and community, as well as our town’s recreation department through continued partnerships with Watershed Inc. and the school district,” said Buena Vista Town Administrator Brian Berger.

“The gym will go back to being what it always was which is a public gymnasium and performing arts space,” Welter said. “In the process of restoring the facility, we have learned that virtually everyone who lived here from 1936 to 2008 has a story about the gym. Maybe more than any other building here, it holds our history.”

In other news, Buena Vista School District was recently awarded \$1 million from the state’s Energy/Mineral Impact Assistance Fund to expand the district’s early childcare education center to improve social equity and generate workforce resilience. Once complete, the childcare center’s playground will back up to McGinnis Gymnasium.

Elizabeth wins grants worth \$1.59 million

Several departments of the Town of Elizabeth have been awarded grants this year, for a total of more than \$1.59 million. The town is proud of its staff members who applied for the grants and appreciative of its grant funders.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

- \$5,000 for the Click it or Ticket campaign for traffic safety and enforcement of the seat belt law, from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- \$6,000 from CDOT for high visibility enforcement, a traffic safety program designed to deter DUI and other unlawful traffic behaviors

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

- \$4,690 from a CommonLook grant to bring the town's electronic communications into compliance for accessibility. This grant was found through SIPA.

CLERK'S OFFICE

- \$1,868 from a pair of grants from the

Eastern Council of Governments for the Grantsmanship Training Program

- \$200,000 in an Energy/Mineral Impact Assistance Grant from the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) to help cover engineering costs for the town's Community and Senior Activity Center. Last year, the town worked with DOLA, University of Colorado Denver, and the University Technical Assistance Program to design the center.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

- \$1 million in funding for the Main Street Streetscape Project from a DOLA Energy/Mineral Impact Assistance Grant
- \$250,000 in funding for the Main Street Streetscape Project from a CDOT Revitalizing Main Street grant
- \$125,000 for the Greater Elizabeth Parks, Trails, and Open Space Master Plan, from a Great Outdoors Colorado Planning and Capacity Grant

La Jara receives grant to develop water master plan

The Town of La Jara has received a \$60,000 grant from DOLA to develop a water master plan.

The town is working with an engineering firm to replace old water lines, reroute some existing lines for better service, repair or replace water pumps in the town's two pump houses, make plans for an above-ground water tank to increase water pressure around town, and plan ahead to prepare the town's water system for future growth and development.

The town's water system was installed in the early 1960s, and repairs to water lines in the past several years have disrupted water service, said Town Manager Larry Zaragoza. The engineering firm has presented its plans to the La Jara Board of Trustees, and Zaragoza says he believes the town is heading in the right direction to improve its water system.

CML

Fall District Meetings

- **District 1:** City of Brush! on Sept. 11
- **District 2:** City of Fort Collins on Sept. 18
- **District 3:** City of Cherry Hills Village on Sept. 12
- **District 4:** City of Cripple Creek on Sept. 11
- **District 5:** Town of Limon on Sept. 4
- **District 6:** City of La Junta on Sept. 25
- **Districts 7 & 14:** Town of La Veta on Sept. 18
- **District 8:** Town of La Jara on Sept. 17
- **District 9:** Town of Ignacio on Sept. 24
- **District 10:** Town of Ridgway on Sept. 23
- **District 11:** City of Grand Junction on Sept. 26
- **District 12:** Town of Kremmling on Sept. 25
- **District 13:** Cities of Cañon City and Florence and Town of Silver Cliff on Sept. 12
- **District 15:** Town of Breckenridge on Sept. 19

GRANT APPLICATION BOOTCAMP

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has provided cities with unprecedented opportunities to apply directly for federal funding, but some cities and towns have fewer resources and staff, impeding their ability to bid effectively. Through the Local Infrastructure Hub, small and mid-sized municipalities can receive an expert suite of supports to develop strong, competitive grant applications through pro-bono technical training and grant-writing Bootcamps. Over the past five Bootcamp series, the Local Infrastructure Hub has helped more than 1,200 cities navigate the federal grant writing process.

This fall, the Local Infrastructure Hub is hosting five bootcamps focused on different funding opportunities made available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. These bootcamps are open for registration. Learn more at tinyurl.com/rue769r5.

DIGITAL EQUITY GRANT

On July 24, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration is accepting applications for the Digital Equity Act's \$1.25 billion Competitive Grant Program, which funds programs that ensure communities have access to devices and skills to fully participate in the digital world, regardless of their background or

circumstances. Learn more at tinyurl.com/2cm9pvch.

MICROGRID FUNDING

The Colorado Resiliency Office has opened another round of funding for the Microgrids for Community Resilience Program. The program is designed to build community resilience through minimizing disruptions to the electrical grid. Utilities in Colorado are eligible for all funding, but local governments and anchor institutions are eligible to apply directly for construction of storage and controller assets. More information is available on the grant program's website, dlg.colorado.gov/microgrids.

Legislation enables local government gas planning pilot projects

House Bill 24-1370 requires the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) to identify up to five local governments, including municipalities, to partner with Xcel Energy as Gas Planning Pilot Communities. Each community will work collaboratively with CEO and Xcel to identify projects that reduce the use of gas and the cost of gas infrastructure by implementing low or zero emissions technologies.

Neighborhood-scale alternative fuel pilot projects will enable selected local governments to implement low or zero-emission resources in their communities, such

as building electrification, networked geothermal heating, or heat pumps. The legislation recognizes that the best opportunity to reduce investment in the gas system and scale low and zero emitting technologies is to align local government knowledge and planning objectives with utility information on gas infrastructure.

To identify planning communities, CEO will issue a request for Information (RFI), publishing a draft of the RFI no later than Nov. 1. CEO will issue a final RFI to select up to five Gas Planning Pilot Communities no later than Dec. 1.

The request for information will outline criteria that CEO will use to identify pilot communities. As required by the law, CEO will prioritize local governments that are interested in thermal energy networks or geothermal projects.

Local government input on the draft RFI will inform the process for selecting the pilot communities and projects. CEO encourages local governments interested in becoming a pilot community to review and provide feedback on the forthcoming draft RFI and to respond to the final RFI once it's available.

FROM PAGE 1

to creating parking, and the importance of community involvement. This site is a perfect example of the risks and rewards of public-private partnerships.

In the RiNo Art District, home to a dynamic Business Improvement District and a creative district, participants learned how it supports local artists and businesses while enhancing the area's appeal. The group visited the fabulous Ramble Hotel, a new development that reflects the neighborhood's character, and explored local art initiatives that contribute to the district's vibrant identity. A short walk

from the Ramble, the tour visited the Denver Central Market and a block of bustling activity that is curated by EDENS.

During the tour luncheon, a panel of local economic development experts explored the power of public-private partnerships in driving urban renewal. The conversation emphasized the importance of collaboration between municipalities and private entities to achieve sustainable development and enhance quality of life.

The tour concluded with a self-guided walk through LoDo, including a glimpse of the newly renovated Union Station.

This annual event, targeting different projects and locations each year, provides

valuable insights for communities considering BIDs, DDAs, and URAs as tools for their own development initiatives.

CML thanks the following individuals for volunteering their time and knowledge to this event: Jim Lindberg, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Frank Lacantore, Colfax Avenue BID; Tracy Huggins, Denver Urban Renewal Authority; Charles Woolly, St. Charles Town Company; Sarah Cawrse, RINO BID; Beth Moyski, Downtown Denver Partnership; Amanda Kannard, Progressive Urban Management Associates; and Terri Takata-Smith, Downtown Boulder Partnership. Learn more about DCI at downtowncoloradoinc.org.

CML LEGAL CORNER



Colorado's property tax battles

By Rachel Bender,
CML senior associate counsel

Colorado's property taxes have been the source of much discussion and legislation for many years. Initially, increasing property values forced the legislature to reduce the residential assessment rate. More recently, two primary factors have led to significant increases in property values and taxes for residential property owners. First was the 2020 repeal of the Gallagher Amendment which, prior to repeal, mandated 45% of property tax revenue come from residential properties while the remaining 55% of revenue come from non-residential properties, despite residential property making up about 80% of the state's total tax value by 2020. Second was the skyrocketing housing market.

Since 2022, the Colorado General Assembly has passed last minute property tax bills in every session to try to alleviate some of these increases. The pressing nature of the issue has even resulted in Gov. Polis calling two special sessions in less than one year, specifically for property tax. The most recent special session began Aug. 26 in hopes it would end the latest property tax battle.

WHY DID THE GOVERNOR CALL ANOTHER SPECIAL SESSION?

At the end of the 2024 legislative session, the General Assembly passed SB24-233 — a bipartisan bill intended to be a permanent property tax solution. However, also brewing at the time were two statewide initiated measures — 50 and 108. Initiative 50 qualified for the 2024 ballot late last year, and 108 qualified in recent weeks.

Initiatives 50 and 108 were put forward by Advance Colorado with the support of Colorado Concerns. These well-funded conservative groups sought to impose significant assessment rate reductions and a poorly conceived statewide 4%

property tax revenue limit. Although many hoped or believed SB24-233 would result in withdrawal of the initiatives, SB24-233 did not cut property taxes deeply enough for the proponents.

As the November election drew closer and certain legislators and state officials became increasingly concerned that voter approval of the initiatives would destroy the state budget, negotiations with the proponents resumed. A deal was seemingly struck through numerous private negotiations involving only proponents, the governor's office, and key legislative leaders. Leveraging the threat of the initiatives, one of Advance Colorado's non-negotiables was a special session to implement "the deal." The governor, a regular proponent of cutting more taxes, eagerly called the special session to "build on the success of bipartisan tax relief."

THE PROPERTY TAX "DEAL"

On Aug. 29, the General Assembly passed "the deal" as HB24B-1001. In its simplest form, HB24B-1001 builds on SB24-233 to implement additional cuts to assessment rates, change the non-school local government revenue limit, establish a similar (but more generous) revenue limit for schools, and provide very limited backfill for the 2025 property tax year. In return, the initiative proponents have stated they and their anonymous donors will not bring a statewide property tax initiative for six years. Despite many legislators expressing clear displeasure about the circumstances, the bill passed with relative ease and only a handful of mostly minor amendments.

Although the assessment rate changes in HB24B-1001 will have a negative fiscal impact, the local government limit will require the most direct work for municipalities. Notably, the limit does not apply to home rule municipalities or any municipality with property tax still subject

to TABOR or the existing statutory 5.5% revenue limit. For those subject to the new limit, revenue is capped at 10.5% for the two-year reassessment cycle but excludes numerous sources of revenue such as new construction, revenue for the payment of bonds, and mills approved by voters on or after Nov. 5, 2024. The bill also allows a one cycle carry-over if the full 10.5% limit is not met, plus local governments retain the ability to ask voters to waive the limit.

THE FUTURE

There were 12 other bills and concurrent resolutions introduced in this special session, some of which may be reintroduced in the 2025 session. One other notable introduction was HCR24B-1001, which required local approval for any statewide property tax initiative to go into effect locally. The HCR passed the House with the required two-thirds vote but was killed in the Senate due to lack of Republican support and because it would have killed "the deal." HCR24B-1001 hints at a desire to make local property taxes a truly local decision, but those same roadblocks make it questionable that this concept will make it to the ballot in the near future.

As many pat themselves on the back over the passage of HB24B-1001, substantial questions and concerns remain. The threat of losing "the deal" over the next six years may cause lawmakers to tread lightly when considering future property tax changes that proponents deem unacceptable. How do we enforce "the deal"? Have we started a dangerous trend of negotiating with special interest groups to avoid initiatives? What about other groups running a statewide measure? And what happens after six years? For now, the battle is over, but the war is likely to wage on.

This column is not intended and should not be taken as legal advice. Municipal officials are always encouraged to consult with their own attorneys.



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