Reinvention: A Spatial History of Westwood

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A Spatial History of Westwood

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People create cities to organize life. Westwood, a neighborhood of Denver, Colorado is no exception. The neighborhood’s streets, buildings, and homes are all legacies of people’s efforts to make a useful system for living. Just like any city, organizing life is not a static endeavor; space is frequently being contested and changed (Davis, 1991; Phillips, 2005). I initially became interested in Westwood because of ways people are shaping the neighborhood environment. Business types are shifting, new apartment buildings are rising, and backyard gardens are growing. Westwood appears to be in a period of rapid change and this change is being driven by government and individuals alike. Following from Smith (1979) and Rose (1984), if the built environment is adapting, then the lives of its people are likely changing as well.

Growth and investment are not the only factors shaping the narrative of Westwood. The USDA (Ver Ploeg & Breneman, 2015) considers Westwood a food desert, a highly contentious label that correlates resident’s proximity to a grocery store to living standards such as obesity rates and poverty. Westwood is also a decidedly blue-collar and Latino neighborhood with a lower average income than the rest of Denver (Westwood Unidos, 2014). In 2007, a Denver Post reporter wrote that, “Residents there live amid the sound of gunshots, which make children sleep with parents for protection” (Osher, 2007). This report followed after a 10 year-old was killed as collateral damage to gang
violence. The neighborhood is complex and dynamic, and did not just become so in an instant.

In this paper, I set out to gain a broader understanding of the neighborhood and its history than what glimpses of sidewalks and news articles about squalid conditions provide. To this end, my analysis of the spatialized history of Westwood begins before the name Westwood existed, when the land was rural farmland. From that point, I argue that Westwood has undergone two distinct periods of reinvention, and is beginning its third. From farmland to boomtown, boomtown to barrio¹, and most recently towards a gentrifying neighborhood, Westwood provides an excellent opportunity to study the process of urban change.

The concepts of neighborhoods and cities are spatial in nature, and so this essay will focus much on the role that the development and use of space affects the people that use it. Neighborhoods are smaller, administrative districts that comprise cities. Even though residents may not self-identify as living in a particular neighborhood, this concept is still important because much of city development and administration happens at the neighborhood level. Additionally, the relative uneven development of neighborhoods in cities play a prominent role in explaining the stages of a city’s development (Smith, 1979; Rose, 1984). People are ultimately the developers and users of space, so

¹ “Barrio” is a Spanish word for neighborhood and is also used as the Latino equivalent of “the
special attention is paid not only to who affects the neighborhood but also which people are enabled and restricted by elements of the spatial organization.

By pointing out which people are enabled and restricted by elements of land use I draw attention to the inequity in the neighborhood’s development (Phillips, 2005; Smith, 1979). Specifically, I bring to the surface how residents, landlords, and other people in Denver have been and are currently affected by Westwood’s development. The neighborhood was originally designed as a quickly constructed suburb to fill a large demand for veteran housing following World War II. Similar to many of Denver’s other neighborhoods built at the time, Westwood was designed in a suburban-style made accessible by heavy reliance on automobiles. At this time the neighborhood was mostly White and middle class. The demographics and the context of Westwood compared to the rest of the city have shifted since Westwood was first founded, and its needs have changed over time. Racially and culturally, the neighborhood has grown to be largely Latino with residents who have immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico. Unlike Westwood’s original residents, the current population’s median household income is $41,516, ten thousand dollars less than Denver’s average (Office of Economic Development, 2015). Slightly less than a quarter of Westwood’s residents earn less than $24,250, the federal government’s threshold for 4 person household poverty (Office of Economic Development, 2015; US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2015). As suburbs have continued to grow around Denver’s periphery, Westwood has become
comparatively more urban. That is Westwood is more closely connected with
the rest of Denver than it stands alone as a suburb.

In this more urban environment, public transportation and walkability
have become more important to residents of Westwood. These are desires and
design elements that were not prominently included in Westwood’s original
design. Most recently, Westwood’s built environment is changing in various
ways including the development of low-income housing and a neighborhood
owned and run food cooperative. These changes, acted upon by several
different groups, could have many different outcomes for Westwood. Studying
the history of the neighborhood can provide insight into what kind of future lies
ahead for Westwood.

I begin this paper with a description of the conceptual framework that
informs my analysis of the spatialized history of Westwood. This is followed by
an empirical presentation of historical events, demographic data, design
research and personal observations to demonstrate that Westwood has had two
major periods of development and is, I argue, beginning its third. The paper
concludes with questions for people interested in reinventing the
neighborhood; primarily: what lessons can we draw from Westwood’s past to
influence its future?

My analysis of the spatial history of Westwood draws on insights and methods from the disciplines of urban geography and urban planning. Urban geography is a multi-disciplinary field that focuses on the spatial organization of cities as systems (Pacione, 2009). As such, it offers a way to examine broad trends related to the development of cities in relation to other cities, neighborhoods, and towns as well as their internal structure. Urban planning, which can be considered a subfield of urban geography, allows one to examine the physical forms of the city that shape the ways that people can use it and interact with each other (Lynch, 1960).

I use Marxist urban geographer Neil Smith’s (1979) framework of gentrification and neighborhood development to understand the particular case of Westwood’s development. Smith argues that gentrification is a process in which “the economic depreciation of capital [previously] invested... [meets] the simultaneous rise in potential ground rent levels produc[ing] the possibility of profitable redevelopment.” From his view, gentrification is the outcome of a multi-stage process: initial investment, capital depreciation, and gentrification. In the first stage, initial investment, capital is imbued in the form of homes or land. Home values generally reflect the value of the land at the moment of development. Although the market value of these developments is not fixed, but fluctuates, capital in the form of real estate stays the same after it is initially
built. As Smith (1979, p. 541) writes: “the fixity of [built] investments forces new development to take place at other, often less advantageous, locations, and prevents redevelopment from occurring until invested capital has lived out its economic life.”

The second stage, capital depreciation, describes the various ways in which capital decreases in value in a neighborhood. “Advances in the productiveness of labor, style obsolescence, and physical wear and tear,” all initiate capital depreciation (Smith, 1979, p. 543). This leads to an increased proportion of renter-occupied housing instead of owner-occupied housing, the under-maintenance of properties, potential redlining, and the eventual abandonment of properties. During the period of capital depreciation “homeowners, aware of imminent decline unless repairs are made, are likely to sell out and seek newer homes where their investment will be safer” (Smith, 1979, 544). The increased presence of landlords does not necessarily mean that property will be undermaintained, but there is less incentive for landlords to maintain property than owners if they can “still command rent.” This is what often contributes to declining home values (Smith, 1979, 544). Redlining, defined as the process through which “financial institutions cease supplying mortgage money to the area” because of perceived high risk investments may also contribute to a decrease in the maintenance of properties and businesses (Smith, 1979, 545). As a result of this, properties may be abandoned when upkeep costs are more than what can be made in rent.
The third stage, gentrification, is when it again becomes profitable to invest in the declining neighborhood. From Smith’s (1979, p. 545) view, this “is produced primarily by capital depreciation... and also by continued urban development and expansion” in surrounding areas. As nearby areas with greater relative value develop around the depreciated neighborhood, the declining neighborhood has greater potential value. Low real estate costs coupled with high potential value makes the neighborhood an ideal place for speculative investors. Smith (1979, 546) argues that most developers are “(a) professional developers who purchase property, redevelop it, and resell for profit; (b) occupier developers who buy and redevelop property and inhabit it after completion; (c) landlord developers who rent it to tenants after completion.”

Figure 1- This figure is a visual representation of Smith’s (1979) theory of gentrification by Phillips (2005). Phillips uses the terms ‘Initial Investment,’ ‘De-investment,’ and ‘Re-investment’ because Smith uses these terms in later articles. I prefer Smith’s 1979 work and the terms used in that article, ‘initial investment,’ ‘capital depreiation,’ and ‘gentrification.’ The terms are different but the concept is the same.
The gentrification stage raises property values in the area, eventually forcing residents that cannot afford the new prices to relocate. Gentrification frequently happens in neighborhoods where marginalized populations occupy.

Smith’s framework for understanding neighborhood development and gentrification helps explain why investment in neighborhoods varies over time and places. This model has been critiqued, however, because of its narrow focus on one outcome: gentrification. Others argue that gentrification, or processes of urban change or renewal can have multiple pathways as well as complex outcomes (Rose, 1984; Jacobs, 1961, Phillips, 2005). Further, the theory does not take into account the agency and influence of the many different types of actors that can change neighborhoods. Smith’s Marxist perspective leads him to focus on capital as the main driver of change in the neighborhood.

As one example, the postmodern geographer, Rose (1984), offers a critique of Smith’s framework that expands the definition of gentrification. She calls for more analysis of “structural conditions or ‘necessary tendencies’ that create the possibility of gentrification” instead of the inevitability of gentrification (Rose, 1984, 48). Social factors such as the subtleties and motivations of different types of ‘gentrifiers’ are important to consider in conjunction with market processes because “the market for such housing certainly cannot be said to be produced purely by the production and promotion of houses” (Rose, 1984, 55). Rose also argues that gentrification
should not be seen as having one process, but instead many processes “with different types of actors taking the lead in different contexts” (Rose, 1984, 57). For instance, Rose takes issue with the idea that gentrifiers, or people that move into declining neighborhood, are always wealthy developers. She sees many different types of gentrifiers such as what she terms “marginal gentrifiers” such as students or first-time home buyers (Rose, 1984, 58).

Mills (1993), a poststructuralist, looks at the rebranding of gentrifying neighborhoods as a dialogue over the contestation of space. An example in Denver’s history is the Highlands neighborhood changing to LoHi (Lower Highlands) as it became gentrified. Mills would argue that the new name is a way of separating the current neighborhood from its past. This dialogue is also facilitated through the proliferation of images, including historic murals, and the language people use to talk about a neighborhood and its residents. For instance, talking about gentrifiers as ‘pioneers’ is telling about how that person may view gentrifiers as a ‘civilizing’ force in the neighborhood. This view is important because it offers a different way of seeing how neighborhoods can develop and become ‘gentrified.’ These approaches propose that there may be different outcomes other than simply displacing poor people of color from a neighborhood for what a ‘gentrified’ neighborhood might look like.

In addition to identifying the broad trends that shape city development, it is valuable to study the physical and spatial forms that affect city living. I draw on theories from urban planner Jacobs’ (1961) tradition of analyzing elements of
spatial development in urban areas and how that affects people. By analyzing design features, one can “learn what principles of planning and practices in rebuilding can promote social and economic vitality in cities” (Jacobs, 1961, 4). This lens is similar to the previously mentioned theories in that it is a tool for analyzing how and why a neighborhood or city comes to be. Jacobs asks a critical question about the nature of city life: ‘what can people do to influence interactions in cities?’ For Jacobs, “there is nothing economically or socially inevitable about either” decay or success (Jacobs, 1961, 7). Instead, she focuses on people’s interactions, and how even the smallest of physical designs such as the width of sidewalks enable and constrain those interactions. This frames people’s work in creating a city in a more active and influential manner. As people are the creators of cities, theorizing about design gives us tools to make them the best that we can.

In summary, I see the urban geographers’ theories of development and gentrification as complementary to urban planner’s work on how development affects people because it helps understand what people do to create environments within the influences of broad and complex systems.

DATA SOURCES AND APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

In order to make sense of the spatial history of Westwood, I utilized three main types of data sources: historical documents, contemporary media produced about Westwood and observational reports from University of
Colorado, Boulder researchers participating in neighborhood activism efforts. Drawing on my framework for understanding neighborhood development, I studied both the historical-spatial development of Westwood and its living and evolving contemporary organization of space. Working across data sources representing diverse time periods and perspectives has allowed me to develop a rich perspective on Westwood’s development and how its future is being negotiated and contested through the actions of multiple stakeholders.

**Historical analysis of spatial relationships**

Much of my work involved gathering historical documents that demonstrated spatial relationships. Most of these documents come from Denver Government Open Data Catalogue. Others came from document archives commissioned by Denver Public Libraries. My goal was to see firsthand as much of the infrastructure change in Westwood as I could. To do so, I analyzed aerial photos of the neighborhood, taken nearly every ten years. Historical topographic maps were a useful crossreference, as many were detailed enough to show individual homes. For more recent data, I used digital mapping techniques to view census data.

**Situating spatial development in community process**

In order to contextualize the visual representations of Westwood, I looked at newspaper articles, community planning documents and the work of other historians. Newspaper articles referenced by historians Simmons &
Simmons (2010) gave insight into major events in Westwood and what kind of people lived there. Community planning documents, the 1986 Westwood Community Plan from Denver Community Planning and Developing and the 2013 Westwood community plan from Westwood Unidos were particularly useful because they listed specific infrastructure issues in the neighborhood. It is difficult to tell how representative these community planning documents are of residents of the neighborhood versus community planners assisting in creating the documents. Other historians provided insight into the politics of the times as well as major events and policies that became a significant part of my narrative.

In addition to these documents, I have also been able to see firsthand many of the most recent changes in Westwood. I have visited residents’ homes and gardens and wandered Westwood’s streets. Contact with

Figure 2 – Cover of the 1986 Westwood Neighborhood Plan. The graphic also shows Westwood in comparison to other Denver neighborhoods.
various community organizations of Westwood and their online resources has given me much insight into the neighborhood and all of the work that the residents of the neighborhood do to make it their own. Professor Jurow and her doctoral students who do ethnographic research in Westwood have guided me towards some of the intricacies of the social life of the neighborhood.

**Limitations of the Study**

In general, this study would have benefitted from greater detail. For times sake I relied on historical analyses of politics and government documents of Denver by Gutfruend and the Simmons couple. I may have noticed other trends spending more time sifting through original government documents. A more detailed demographics map than what is visible at the census block level would have been useful in describing more specifically who is in Westwood. To collect this data myself would have taken an exorbitant amount of time. Were I to expand this study, I would perform ethnographic research with various groups in the neighborhood, particularly community organization meetings. This would help bring the personal stories of Westwood to the forefront of this narrative.

**THREE PERIODS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTWOOD**

In this section, I draw on Smith, Rose, and Jacobs to present an analysis of the development of Westwood that attends to gentrification, uneven
development, and how infrastructure affects interactions. The following three sections demonstrate how one neighborhood was quickly and deliberately developed into a suburban community, how the infrastructure and market forces led to the dilapidation of the same neighborhood, and most recently, a surge of reinvestment that may once again reinvent the character of the neighborhood.

**Creating a Suburb**

The initial investment laid the groundwork for organizing land in Westwood. Layout and design established in the 1950’s have largely persisted to the present and have left a legacy favoring suburban land use, independent homes with yards. Current housing styles, plot sizes, roads, and zoning regulations are all influential design legacies. During this period of establishment, the neighborhood was actively supported and directly affected by city, state, and federal funding. This development was largely for WWII veterans. This period was the most active in terms of investment, particularly from people outside of Westwood.
An analysis of aerial photos from 1937 and 1954 dramatically display Westwood’s primary development (Gander, 2014, 125-126). The 1937 aerial photograph reveals that the land where Westwood would develop was primarily agricultural. Large open green spaces and planting rows are both visible amongst unevenly dispersed housing. Although difficult to tell from this photo, a newspaper article from 1946 reports that Westwood was a site for informal housing during the depression (reproduced in Westwood Neighborhood Plan, 1986). Westwood was a sensible location for informal housing because of its access to the paved major arterial, Alameda, while being just outside of Denver’s city limits as shown in historical topographic maps.
Being outside city limits would exempt people from building codes. There is visible evidence of these informal homes particularly on the east side of the 1937 photo. Further evidence that this was a site of informal housing are winding driveways and trails visible across a semi-gridded landscape. Gridded roads show that there was some element of planning, but the intermingling with winding roads suggests unofficial road development in the area.

With the advent of the automobile, and Denver politicians favoring this transportation type, the farmland of Westwood became an increasingly desirable location to invest in real estate development. Under the leadership of Mayor Ben Stapleton, the 1929 “Denver Plan” established that any future transportation growth should be focused around the automobile (Gutfruend, 2004, 78). Denver’s city core, equipped with trolleys, was becoming cluttered and jammed with an increasing number of cars navigating the streets. The solution to clashing transportation types and spatial organizations was to phase out public transportation and reorganize roads for automobile traffic (Gutfruend, 2004, 79). Promoting automobiles would also enable the city to extend beyond a dense center. Denver’s accommodations for the car would prove to be extremely influential; today the city is mostly suburban, including Westwood. Automobiles and the middle class lifestyle went hand in hand. Owning a home and a car were both becoming symbols of middle class
success. Organizing Denver around the automobile was an important step in actively supporting a middle class, suburban lifestyle.

In addition to the local Denver government, further assistance to the middle class, suburban lifestyle came from the state government, which was also promoting automobility growth in the 1930s. A quarter of the state budget was spent on road construction in this period (Gutfruend, 2004, 80). Even though the majority of Denver’s population did not own cars, everyone paid for the expansion of new roads. The state and local Denver government were anti-toll-road, and so therefore road construction was paid for in taxes regardless of road use (Gutfruend, 2004, 81). This again privileged the construction of suburban communities throughout Denver. Westwood would benefit initially from road construction, making it and other suburban neighborhoods more accessible to the city. The road network around Denver would also provide a structure for suburban growth that established many neighborhoods further west of Westwood. Aggressive expansion of roads in Denver with public funds actively supported those seeking middle class lifestyles.

Along with local and state governments, the federal government additionally supported the development of suburban West Denver with its creation of 50,000 military jobs directly in the late 1930s (Gutfruend, 2004, 83). Many of these jobs were located outside of the core of Denver, which made suburban living even more appealing and accessible. Denver suburbs grew rapidly during this period. To facilitate this rapid growth and keep up with a
demand for WWII veteran housing, a Colorado Statute was passed in 1947 to make development of land quicker and more affordable (Gutfruend, 2004, 113). With only a 15% “pro forma” approval rating from the current residents of the area, developers could establish a “metropolitan district.” According to Gutfruend (2004, 113), “a developer could single handedly create such a district before selling any of his land and thereby avail himself of a broad range of municipal powers including zoning, eminent domain, levying property taxes, and – most importantly – bonding, with no debt limit”. In addition, these metropolitan districts were given federally subsidized tax exemptions. Westwood is one of these metropolitan districts, officially annexed by the city in 1947 (Simmons & Simmons, 2010, 66). The neighborhood was quickly transformed from a trailer park and shantytown into an official Denver neighborhood with up-to-date housing. Just a few years later, as seen in the 1954 aerial photograph, the new uniform development pattern is clearly visible (Phase I Environmental Plan, 2014, 126). Like much of West Denver, government military workers owned these homes (Simmons & Simmons, 2010). Veterans of the war were supported in many ways by the federal government in this period and one of the results more veterans were investing in owning their own home. In 1947, home ownership was up to 52% percent compared to 42% in 1940 (Simmons & Simmons, 2010, 65). Increasing percentage home ownership would continue as suburbs expanded around
Denver. Such support greatly encouraged home ownership in this initial period. This kind of support, however, would not continue for Westwood.

**Figure 4- Aerial photograph in 1954.**

**Tensions Around Becoming an Urban Neighborhood**

Smith’s second stage of capital depreciation begins as soon as properties are built, however, depreciation becomes more visible about 25 years after the initial construction of the neighborhood when “advances in the productiveness of labor, style obsolescence, and physical wear and tear” become more apparent (1979, 543). In accordance with Smith’s theory, around 1970, Westwood began experiencing the effects of capital depreciation. Westwood’s capital
depreciation cannot only be explained using Smith’s model. In this section, I analyze the infrastructure legacies of the initial investment period and how they have influenced Westwood during its second stage.

Since 1970, Westwood has become comparatively more urban as suburbs continue to expand to beyond Westwood and Denver’s core continues to grow. Westwood’s demographics have also shifted during this period, changing from a predominantly White and middle class population to a predominantly Latino and blue collar population, many of whom are recent immigrants. This section analyzes the tensions that arose around the mismatch of the neighborhood infrastructure and its new population. Issues around absentee landlords, zoning laws and transportation structures all arise in this period. Local, state, and federal support Westwood received in its initial growth phase would not continued past the late 60s further marking a shift in Westwood’s status.

The fact that military jobs relocated outside of Denver by the late 1960s was a major change for Westwood and West Denver (Gutfruend, 2004, 84). The major employer for the area left almost completely and many of the residents working in those jobs did as well. Because many of those moving out were homeowners, they were able to rent to the new incoming population. Latinos were the most notable group moving into Westwood as well as throughout West Denver. By 1970, Westwood was 60% Latino, where in the 1950s, the neighborhood had been predominantly white (Rivera et al., 1998,
Latinos continued to move to Westwood, which is now 80% Latino (Census Block Groups, 2010). The change in available jobs in the area precipitated demographic change. Many of the new residents in the neighborhood rented homes, an indicator that capital in the neighborhood was depreciating in value.

Often blue-collar working class families, the Latinos and others moving to the neighborhood often did not have had the resources to buy their own homes (Rivera et al., 1998, 209). A shift from owner-occupied housing to renter-occupied housing has contributed to the low quality of homes in Westwood. A city survey in 1970 showed that 25% of homes in West Denver had major external defects (Rivera et al., 1998, 210). This comparatively low quality of homes may have been an asset to renters looking for low prices. As Smith theorizes, undermaintainance begets undermaintainance; an overmaintained home in the neighborhood would be less competitive with rent prices as other homes. That Westwood now has 27% of Denver’s substandard housing demonstrates that this trend of undermaintainance has continued (Crangle, 2014).

Rivera et al.’s (1998) discussion of Latinos political power in Denver, offers another perspective for why home quality for Latinos in West Denver could be lower. “Socioeconomic powerlessness,” or comparatively lower socioeconomic status a result of racial oppression in the U.S. and “external control” of the residents of West Denver Latinos in the form of absentee
landlords and zoning laws, could contribute to the low quality of homes in Westwood (Rivera et al., 1998, 209-211). In addition, lack of political power as a minority group likely diminishes the power of the Latino residents to influence landlords to improve their properties. Although it is unclear how many of Westwood’s residents were renters, Rivera et al. (1998) give a statistic from the 1970 census that the West Denver barrio as a whole was 77% renter occupied.

Westwood residents and city planners in the 1986 Westwood Neighborhood Plan and the 2013 Westwood Panel Report identifies a lack of home ownership as a major problem for the neighborhood (p. 9 & 12). This contributed to the decrease in neighborhood real estate value.

Zoning is an issue that urban planners would call attention to as a contributing factor to declining value of a neighborhood (Jacobs, 1961). The 1986 Westwood Neighborhood Plan lists zoning and land use as the most pertinent issue facing the neighborhood, and many of the complaints entailed are still present (Jacobs, 1961, 12). The plan calls for zoning and enforcement of zoning that would encourage the establishment of businesses useful to the residents of Westwood. Zoning along Morrison Road, Westwood’s main corridor, was and is for commercial use; however, use does not always conform to the regulations. There are commercial businesses, but some homes and industrial sites as well (Westwood Unidos, 2014). The neighborhood organization asked in this proposal for renewed efforts in enforcing this commercial zone and for strategizing a transition away from “junk yards, adult
theaters, adult bookstores, bars, liquor stores, and high intensity automotive repair” towards “daily and weekly personal and household needs” (Westwood Neighborhood Plan, 1986, 13). The 2013 Westwood Panel Report agrees that Morrison is still inappropriately used (p. 9); the street in 2015 looks very similar to the report from 1986.

Some would argue that it is not the responsibility of the Denver government to encourage certain types of businesses to locate in Westwood; however, research suggests that the physical layout of streets plays a large role in how spaces are used (Biddulph, 2012; Gattis and Watt, 1999). As one example, Gattis and Watt (1999), studied street width and its correlation with traffic speed (1999). They found that street speed is positively correlated with street width, but that the function of the street is also an important factor in speed (Gattis and Watt, 1999, 199). Suburban streets and commuter streets had higher speeds than urban ones. Morrison Road is both wide and used as a commuter street, and my first hand accounts confirm that traffic on the street is fast. Biddulph (2012, 213) demonstrated that effective slowing of traffic increased the amount of time people spent in that area, not just driving slower, but also “engaging in optional activities and ... socializing.” Westwood’s main road seems the opposite, as I have experienced it to be difficult to cross and typically without others to socialize with. Fast cars and consequently low levels of pedestrian traffic can have negative effects on businesses (Jacobs, 1961). The road design element likely also contributed to Westwood’s capital depreciation.
Another aspect contributing to a dilapidated main corridor is the lack of infrastructure for pedestrian traffic. Vernez Moudon et al. (2007, 48) demonstrate in their research a lack of pedestrian traffic in suburban neighborhoods is not inherent, but “formal,” “continuous,” and “safe” pathways can support pedestrian traffic even in sub-urban areas. Westwood is both suburban in design, and lacking appropriate structure for pedestrian travel, such as crosswalks on Morrison or neighborhood trails. Lack of infrastructure combined with fast traffic on its main road makes it undesirable for pedestrian traffic. Jacobs (1961) theorized that pedestrian traffic was essential for vibrant business areas, and contemporary researchers Baker and Wood agree that pedestrian traffic accommodations are still vital for vibrant shopping areas (Jacobs, 1961, 29; Baker & Wood, 2010). These structural changes are aspects that can be changed, and the neighborhood community organizations asked for these changes from the city government in 1986 and 2013. Some action has been taken. There are crosswalks by the school and a new bike lane along Morrison Road. Without crosswalks and other methods of slowing traffic and encouraging pedestrians, Morrison Road in many ways better suits the commuters going through Westwood than the residents walking through.

This section has shown that both compounding factors of capital depreciation that Smith (1979) draws attention to and infrastructure issues that urban planners focus on have contributed to decline of value in the neighborhood.
Forms of Reinvestment

In the current moment, Westwood appears to be entering a new phase with great deal of investment. It is unclear, however, whether or not we should describe this period as gentrification. From Smith’s view, this phase would be called gentrification because rent values are rapidly rising due to reinvestment in the neighborhood and because of funding assistance from government sources to investors. Unlike the initial investment phase, where large scale construction was taken on by relatively few, investment in happening in a variety of forms by many people. People are investing in different ways than Smith’s model predicts. Beyond Smith’s labeling of “professional developers,” “occupier developers” and “landlord developers” as the major actors in gentrification, nonprofits and community organizations are also playing a role in changing the landscape. In agreement with Rose, I propose that a more complicated process of gentrification is unfolding. My analysis challenges the notion that what is taking place is a “single or unitary phenomenon” where property prices rise and people are displaced by people seeking new homes (Rose, 1984, 57). As I show in this section, diverse groups that are working to change the landscape and future of Westwood.

On a city-wide scale, Denver is growing rapidly; Westwood is part of this growth. According to Forbes Magazine, Denver is the 6th fastest growing U.S. City in 2014 (Fortie, 2014). Like many other neighborhoods in Denver, such as LoHi and Five Points, developers are building apartments in Westwood to
accommodate the demand for housing. Much of this growth comes from young people moving to live closer to Denver’s core. Smith would argue that Westwood, due to its location close to Denver’s downtown and its low real estate prices make it a potentially profitable place for investment.

This growth is already changing Westwood. Morrison Road has three new apartment complexes with mixed-use business space along the street front. The additional space increases the number of people that can live in the neighborhood. There is new store space along the street front of Alameda. Added value of this new construction is already influencing home prices. Anecdotal reports also suggest that in March 2015, a potential homebuyer was recently outbid the asking price by $40,000 (personal communication with Susan Jurow, 3-19-2015). Various government funding is coming into the neighborhood to facilitate this growth, an important indicator for Smith that gentrification is occurring. One of the apartment complexes being built along Alameda was awarded “almost $1 million in federal tax credits” (Crangle, 2014). Morrison Road is labeled a “Denver Enterprise Zone,” which offers nine state tax credit incentives for businesses that establish there (Office of Economic Development, 2015). Denver government is investing in the public space also. Morrison Road now has bike lanes and a neighborhood park was recently renovated.

Nonprofits and other community organizations are making a visible impact, despite not traditionally being seen as ‘gentrifiers.’ The over three
hundred gardens that the non-profit ReVision has assisted residents in growing gives Westwood a distinctive character. ReVision employs people from inside and outside of the neighborhood. ReVision is also opening a co-op “Food Hub,” a grocery store that would ideally sell food produced by neighborhood gardens. There is a lot of fresh paint along Morrison Road. BuCu West’s initiatives have helped businesses repaint their store fronts and has commissioned several murals. BuCu West is made up of local business and property owners. BuCu West’s “Eyes on the Street” program, an organization of a neighborhood watch, is based on one of Jacob’s principles that safe streets are ones that are easily visible (BuCu West, 2015). Although a neighborhood watch is not what Jacobs had in mind when she theorized about street safety, this rhetoric from BuCu West demonstrates that they see themselves as active designers of the neighborhood’s social and economic environment. There are many more community organizations like ReVision and BuCu West, such as LiveWell Westwood, Westwood Unidos and 9to5, that are each working with community members to promote various visions for Westwood.

Murals and neighborhood names are another non-traditional investment in the neighborhood that attempt to label and re-envision the space. Westwood has mural after mural, largely supported by BuCu West, that

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2 Jacobs emphasized the importance of “mixed use” streets when she wrote about “eyes on the street.” She envisioned that street design, would encourage various types of people to be on, or watching the street at various times of the day. She says this is done with apartments, stores of various kinds, open at various times and sidewalks that encouraged people to sit outside. A neighborhood watch seeks to influence behavior, without the design element Jacobs suggests.
draw on the Chicano culture of the neighborhood. This includes a mural of Cesar Chavez, and one of a woman in Aztec dress in between images of Aztec temple and Denver (see figure-5). Despite many ethnic groups such as Indians, Vietnamese, Whites, and other Latinos, the dominant imagery is Chicano. Mills (1993, 150) sees both images and conversations people have as a way to “make sense of their social identity in terms of their environment” and to “reveal and reproduce - and sometimes resist- social order.” From this view, some Chicanos are making sense of their role in the community, claiming the space as part of their history and future.
During a gentrification process, renting residents are often forced to leave because they are unable to keep up with rising rent prices. On the other hand, people that own property in the neighborhood before the neighborhood began gentrifying, or bought just as it began gentrifying, have property that has rapidly increased in value. Westwood currently has 58% owner-occupied properties (Office of Economic Development, 2015). If people both outside and inside the neighborhood continue to invest in Westwood, homeowners will likely benefit economically. The other 42% may have to move. 23.9% of Westwood households earn less than $25,000 a year and it will be especially challenging for these people to remain in the neighborhood if rent prices continue to rise (Office of Economic Development, 2015). The poor in a gentrifying neighborhood are not positioned to benefit from the economic changes; however, as I have argued in this analysis, gentrification, or alternately, reinvention, is a complex process with uncertain outcomes. Historically marginalized communities, well-off gentrifiers, and others in between may develop new ways of living together.

**Discussion**

Rapid economic change can be a boon for some, while it can tear others up from their roots. Interactions between newcomers and current residents have the potential to be both challenging and enriching. This section addresses lessons from Westwood’s past to anticipate some of the challenges Westwood may face in the future.
One of the most positive changes to emerge from this most recent reinvestment phase is the greater variety of buildings, businesses, and homes. Like a forest with only one type of tree, it has little resilience to disturbances or disasters. Westwood was initially designed like a one-type-of-tree forest. The suburban landscape with the same type of homes, all the same age, with many of its residents dependent on the same military positions was not designed to adapt. There are now 50 year-old homes alongside new apartment complexes. There is a greater variety of stores and access to means of transportation. At least right now, Westwood is home to a broad range of people, socioeconomically and culturally. This heterogeneity of resources may be positioning Westwood as a more resilient and thriving city neighborhood (Walker and Salt, 2006).

This case analysis of Westwood raises a number of questions for the people who want to reinvent the neighborhood. Can urban planners design neighborhoods to support diversity, resilience, and adaptability from the start? Is gentrification an opportunity for urban planners to reimagine the organization of a space alongside the reinvention already occurring? The process of gentrification can benefit many groups. It offers artists and entrepreneurs affordable spaces to live and work. For those looking for temporary, affordable places with easy access to the rest of the city, gentrifying neighborhoods provide a place to live. Later on in the process, the wealthy utilize homes in convenient locations with innovative neighborhood
businesses. Neighborhood schools receive more funding as inflow from property taxes increase. Residents that owned land may choose to stay or leave, but either way they benefit from rising property values. Yet, these changes do not benefit renters that can no longer afford to live in the neighborhood. Do these people have some right to the benefit that others gain from the neighborhood? Many residents who may be forced to leave have contributed to the increased value of the space. Gentrification is not necessarily an inherent or natural course of action in cities. As I have argued in this paper, gentrification is a complex process relating to the neighborhood’s initial development design and greater market trends within the city.

Although neighborhood advertisements, neighborhood names, and murals all present a dialogue about the space, these ‘conversations’ are implicit. Gentrification appears to be a mysterious and surprising process for many, and perhaps the neighborhood would benefit from explicit dialogue about gentrification. Thus far, those taking active roles in redefining the space are having a greater impact on the community’s environment. Explicit and public conversations about the neighborhood’s direction could encourage greater participation. It is my hope that this analysis can contribute to a more open and reflective dialogue about Westwood’s past and its future. As we build and grow our metropolises, let us remember and study our pasts so that hopefully human kind can grow with its cities.
References


