Creating Place: Activist Intellectuals in Boulder, Colorado, 1959 to 1967

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Introduction
On November 7, 1967, Boulder, Colorado adopted a city charter amendment which established a Greenbelt surrounding the city. The Greenbelt Program was a local expression of growing concerns over the environment and fear of urban sprawl. Today the Greenbelt Program, which has become the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Department, has acquired 103,118 acres of land, physically insulating the county with open space.\(^1\) The open space acquisitions have preserved mountain views, provided outdoor recreational opportunities, protected and restored sensitive ecologies, and prevented suburban development from consuming the Boulder valley.\(^2\) Boulder’s open space has come to define its identity as a city surrounded by a beautiful landscape. The most common symbol to represent the city is the profile of the flatirons — a sandstone rock formation which shoots high above the city. This paper is an examination of the events which led to the passage of the Greenbelt amendment and particularly the role of professors at the University of Colorado.\(^3\)

This thesis investigates how the environmental movement changed in Boulder between 1959 and 1967. It explores how the expanding student body and specifically the faculty after World War II impacted municipal decision making. In studying university faculty and their attitudes towards the environment, I focus primarily on their activist organizations and the effect

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\(^2\) This ignores the negative consequences of the greenbelt. Which is primarily an accusation of socioeconomic segregation. Open space has certainly driven up the cost of housing but the responsibility I believe, as do other authors, lays on the Slow Growth Ordinance, popularly referred to as the Danish Plan, adopted in 1976. This conclusion is supported by Mark David Adams, "Planning The Green City? : Growth Management, Environmentalism, And The Politics Of Place In Boulder, Colorado, 1959-2001" (Ph.D, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2006). For evidence of increased cost of housing because of the greenbelt see Mark R. Correll, Jane H. Lillydahl and Larry D. Singell, "The Effects Of Greenbelts On Residential Property Values: Some Findings On The Political Economy Of Open Space", Land Economics 54, no. 2 (1978): 207.

\(^3\) For many involved the Greenbelt was an expression of a new world view which rejected war as much as environmental degradation.
of those organizations on municipal decisions. This paper is concerned primarily with the new intellectual activists immigrating to Boulder in the 1950s.4

This thesis argues that the idea of a Greenbelt surrounding Boulder originated from new university faculty hired in the 1950s and that they moved to Boulder because of the cities association with mountain parks. Every graduate of the University of Colorado describes driving over Davidson Mesa and looking down on Boulder. Open space is a physical barrier of undeveloped land physically dividing the city from the rest of Colorado. Driving over that final hill you have a sense of arrival — this feeling is perhaps best described as a sense of place. Understanding the origins of the Open Space Program helps us understand the contemporary political questions of the city and the whole county and its identity.5 For example, debates have taken place since the Open Space Program was established between county residents and city residents over the use of open spaces purchases to direct fringe development in Boulder County.6

The continuity between the Progressive Era and the 1960s in Boulder sheds light on why a popular environmental movement arose when it did. The Progressive Era, seen as the beginning of conservation and preservation in America, dealt with problems of pollution, wilderness conservation, and natural resource protection. Despite these environmental concerns a

5 The Open Space Program was in charge of acquiring and maintaining the greenbelt land and was eventually combined into the Open Space and Mountain Parks Department. The two departments combined together is itself proof of the Greenbelt’s dependence upon the early acquisition of mountain parks.
popular and politically potent environmental movement did not emerge until the late 1960s and 1970s.

Adam Rome summarizes three main explanations historians invoke to explain for the environmental revolution of the late 1960s. First, the new wealth of the postwar years caused millions of Americans to question whether pollution was a necessary cost of growth. Second, technological innovation, including atomic energy and new synthetic materials, created new environmental concerns. Third, new ecological understanding helped citizens appreciate the dilemmas created through human interaction with nature.7

Boulder’s embrace of a Greenbelt to resolve suburban sprawl was unusual, however. The University of Colorado’s enrollment went from 11,054 in 1960 to 20,658 in 1970.8 Boulder County’s population went from 48,296 to 131,889.9 At the same time bulldozers were clearing millions of acres for new tract housing. From 1950 to 1970 the City of Denver grew by 100,000 while the Metropolitan area’s population doubled. The new residents drawn in by Colorado’s post-war boom, these statistics show, were increasingly moving to the suburbs.10 This paper will examine Boulder’s reaction to this rapid growth and development.

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Early History of Boulder and its Mountain Parks

The early history of the town of Boulder, Colorado is typical of a 19th century mining town except for its early conservationist ethic which helped develop health, scenic, and educational tourism. The sale of only large land plots discouraged speculation which was often a destructive force in the early West. The city managed to establish several health facilities for people, especially those recovering from tuberculosis. Furthermore the construction of the state university provided many opportunities which would not have been available otherwise. The period from 1859 to the 1920s was characterized by slow and deliberate growth in terms of population. Boulder County’s large purchases of mountain park land well before the creation of National Park Service, shows an early conviction towards conservationism. The political balance between pro-growth business interests and conservationists eventually shifted with the post-WWII boom in population.

The Boulder City Town Company was established in 1859 following the discovery of gold. The city’s location at the entrance to the mountains was prime for mining supply, which became an important source of income for the city. The town laid out 4,044 large land plots for $1,000 each. Land prices were set intentionally high by the cities early residents to discourage speculation: a successful strategy, because few sales took place. Lynn Perrigo, a historian hired by the city to write its early history, suggests the founders feared the boom and bust cycle of mining towns and thus did not want to invite rapid growth into the city. The gold was difficult to extract from the surrounding area, leading some miners to turn towards farming. Farmers and

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12 It seems homeowners feared the same things as they do today — devaluation of their property.
suppliers purchased large land plots while the mining population seems to have primarily built temporary shanties closer into the mountains. The first decade was difficult because of a grasshopper plague in 1861 and a slowed economy caused by the Civil War.

The bid for the University of Colorado by the Territorial Legislature was given to Boulder in 1861 because of an active and wealthy citizenry. Boulder’s success at winning the University, at least tentatively, as no ground was broken for more than a decade, was influential in the city’s development. Three Boulderites donated the land for the first University in Colorado. The first building, Old Main, was erected and the University admitted its first students in 1876. The University continued to grow annually, quickly adding on new departments, including a medical school in 1881.

Mineral production grew erratically but agriculture and business had steadier growth. The discovery of silver lodes and telluride nearby in 1872 led to the investment and completion of two railways in 1873. Furthermore, the railways helped drive the profitability and civic vitality of the City. Gold and telluride deposits peaked at $500,000 a year in 1880. Gold mining picked up in the 1890s and was valued at an annual production of over one million dollars in 1892. As mining reached and passed its peak, farming grew continuously; by 1940, half of all Boulder county was farmland.

Heated debates took place between citizens encouraging more industrial factories and people desiring a quiet frontier town. After a prospective industrialist toured Boulder with

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14 Donors are George A. Andrews, Anthony Arnett, and M.G. Smith
15 ibid
16 Lynn Irwin Perrigo, A Municipal History Of Boulder, Colorado, 1871-1946 (Boulder CO: Boulder County Historical Society and the city of Boulder, 1946), 8
17 Ibid,18.
encouragement from a minority of citizens, one pro-industry supporter wrote, “Boulder must have factories and the only way to get them is to seize them when in sight…billious traitors to their own city and to their own families should be weeded out…” Unlike other front range communities, Boulderites offered little incentive for industrial factories, instead focusing their money on another economy — education. The city built the first school building and had the first class to graduate from a public high school in Colorado. In education, Boulder excelled.

Emma Fairhurst, born in 1865, exemplified the region’s transition towards tourism. Her father was a mining booster and administrator in Boulder County. But Emma Fairhurst made a living through her summer camps and the Columbia Hotel she built in Ward. Her hotel’s fireplace was made of studded pieces of gold ore — a perfect example of the transition from mining camp to tourist destination. Tourism in the region continued to grow but was jump-started with the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915.

The addition to the City of the Chautauqua began the cities rapid acquisition of mountain park land. The University of Texas Board of Regents chose Boulder, Colorado as the location of their Chautauqua. A bond election successfully purchased two sections of eighty acres for the Chautauqua. The purchase of the Chautauqua grounds prompted a land grab for mountain parks by Boulder County. These original purchases of large tracts of mountain park land would become important for attracting federal dollars from the New Deal. Before the Chautauqua

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18 Ibid, 60. L.C. Paddock wrote these words in the Camera, July 28, 1891. He suggested Boulder offer land at a discount to industrialists. Boulderites would instead give away land free to the University.
20 Passed in April 1898. One section was the base of Flagstaff and the other at Green Mountain.
21 Chautauqua was Boulder’s first public park. Until the Chautauqua an abandoned train yard was considered the only public park.
22 Boulder was among the most active counties for the Civilian Conservation Corp.
Boulder had no public parks but within ten years had acquired hundreds of acres of mountain park land.

Yet even before the Chautauqua and the creation of mountain parks citizens of Boulder were interested in the development of the city. In 1890 the Boulder Civic Improvement Association (B.C.I.A.) was founded although not particularly active, it published a pamphlet intended to inspire “interest in the cleanliness and beauty of our city” in 1898.23 The city’s papers in the 1900s complained about the barren, treeless, garbage filled streets. In 1907 Mr. Herbert Shattuck, a former mining supervisor turned real estate developer, suggested bringing an eastern landscape architect to Boulder. On the 13th of June of 1907, the Boulder Daily Camera announced that Harvard educated landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. would be traveling to consult the city — paid for by the B.C.I.A..24

The B.C.I.A. was primarily male and middle class, and most were members of the business community — a newspaper editor, physicians, bankers, and real estate investors.25 The B.C.I.A. had one female member, Maud Clark Gardiner Odell, a widow and Chair of the Standing Committee on Education.26 She did not form a separate organization of “civic mothering”, as was typical, but instead joined the men. The organization did not include working class members or skilled laborers.

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23 This evidence disproves other histories include Lynn Perigo’s Municipal History of Boulder which believes the B.C.I.A. was not active until 1904.
24 “Olmsted Coming to Boulder” June 13, 1907. Daily Camera Not to be confused with his father.
Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. visited Boulder in 1908 for eight days. His report, now known as the Olmsted Plan, was published with delay in 1910. It recommended the city develop additional city parks, greater control and beautification of the creek, and a new sewage system. The City Beautiful movement, a “design cult” as Jane Jacobs described it, had reached Boulder.

Olmsted’s report went mostly disregarded. Citizens voted down the plan’s recommendations. In this sense, the City Beautiful movement in Boulder was democratic and not imposed by the wealthy. The wealthier professionals of Boulder, despite bringing Olmsted to Boulder at their expense, depended upon popular support for financing the changes through bond elections. The main recommendations the city did maintain from the plan was keeping the irrigation canals and purchasing, when possible, former railroad land along Boulder Creek. Olmsted’s recommendations would return in 1967 when they were reprinted for the open space sales tax campaign.

The central figure for the early land acquisitions was Charles M. Campbell, the city attorney. He successfully petitioned Congress for Flagstaff Mountain. The land was donated to the city for the express purpose of protecting it from logging. The Federal Government sold and donated several large tracts of land to Boulder for resource conservation.

In his petition to Congress Campbell argued that Flagstaff should be donated to Boulder for protection from complete deforestation. The City of Boulder would “take pleasure and exercise its best endeavors in caring for and preserving the native trees…and will plant and

27 In my research I discovered that Olmsted spent one day in Denver and met with the President of CU. They discussed the possibility of Olmsted designing the University of Colorado Campus as well Olmsted offered advice on the placement of Mackey Auditorium.
28 The reprinting was payed for by the Thorne Ecological Institute
29 He drafted his proposal to acquire Flagstaff weeks after writing the legal agreement between the Texas Colorado Chautauqua Association and the City of Boulder.
30 Box 3. C.M. Campbell Collection, University of Colorado Archives.
encourage the planting of other trees thereon.” His argument suggested that being near “our state university” it would be used as a park not only by residents of the County, but by students of the State of Colorado. The University played an important role in the legal argument for Congressional donation of the mountain land. The City of Boulder benefited not only intellectually, but politically, from the legitimacy the University brought.

The Forest Service donated and leased several pieces of land including land for the Alpine Mountain Research Station to the University in the 1920s and 1930s. The participation of ecologists and scientists in determining land acquisition began with the permission to use thirty acres of land in Arapahoe National Forest. The site was selected based on several compelling factors for research by Dr. Francis Ramaley, who was also a member of the B.C.I.A. in 1934.31

The mountain park donations, combined with the Olmsted plans recommending purchasing tracts along Boulder Creek which runs through the city, led the county to own a significant amount of park land. In total, by 1920, the city owned nearly 3,000 acres of parks along with 2,000 acres of watershed land.32 The city parks and improvements were then valued at $127,000. In 1928 Boulder had “the largest acreage of municipally owned mountain park lands of any city of its size in the world.”33 Boulder had achieved a distinguished place as a city of mountain parks — the origins of the ‘green city’ identity today.

The city identity from 1859 to 1930 shows a pattern of civic participation in relationship to land use planning which continues into the present. The first Parks and Planning Commission created in 1918 was made primarily of members from the B.C.I.A..34 Members of PLAN

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31 Francis Ramaley Collection, University of Colorado Archives
32 Lynn Irwin Perrigo, A Municipal History Of Boulder, Colorado, 1871-1946 (Boulder CO: Boulder County Historical Society and the city of Boulder, 1946),
33 Lynn Irwin Perrigo, A Municipal History Of Boulder, Colorado, 1871-1946 (Boulder CO: Boulder County Historical Society and the city of Boulder, 1946),
34 Eben G. Fine Papers, Box 1 304-1-4. Boulder Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO.
Boulder, an advocacy group for the greenbelt program, eventually became members of the Open Space Commission. In both cases, University faculty were influential and civic activists became the administrators.

The City of Boulder in the nineteenth and early twentieth century moved away from the boom and bust cycle typical of frontier towns. The city’s value came from the environments healing ability physically, for the patients at the Sanitarium, and mentally, for the students of the University. This underlying value of the environment, held institutionally and culturally, helps to explain the strong conservationist motivations Boulder has in the mid-twentieth century.

The efforts of Campbell and the B.C.I.A helped identify Boulder as a city of mountain parks. The early history shows relationship between the University and conservation which would continue into the 1960s. Furthermore Olmsted's visit shows that Boulderites saw urban planning as a tool for civic improvement that was not limited to the seemingly practical but incorporated ideas of aesthetics. Flagstaff was acquired through the University and appealing to ideas of resources conservation of the woods. But Olmsted’s recommendations showed a growing emphasis on scenic conservation — an idea central to the Blueline and Greenbelt campaigns. The idea of Boulder as a city of mountain parks was important for drawing recreationally minded immigrants to Boulder.

**Peoples League for Action Now**

The Peoples League for Action Now Boulder—this should come sooner, PLAN Boulder, was formed with the goal of more permanent conservation. PLAN Boulder held its first meeting on September 24, 1959 electing its board members of which more than half were university
Unlike the earlier Civic Improvement Association, PLAN Boulder did not rely on outside experts like Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. but instead used university expertise. The first meeting outlined three major concerns: parks, greenbelts, and zoning.

The October 1960 newsletter of PLAN Boulder noted that Jean McDowell was preparing a map of proposed greenbelt and park areas. McDowell submitted her thoughts and analysis to the county regional planning commission but the issue disappeared inside the city’s administration for five years. The invitational letter, written by Bartlett, to the first meeting of PLAN Boulder invited people to join, “a more imaginative and enlightened pattern of community development.” PLAN Boulder was part of the growing relationship between environmental activism and urban planning.

The University professors who had moved recently to Boulder believed in a greenbelt made of open space purchased by the municipality. Understanding how this was a new idea requires reflecting on past ideas of open space and greenbelt. Ebenezer Howard originated the idea of the greenbelt in 1898 in his book To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform. He saw greenbelt as surrounding a community and being made up primarily of agricultural land with some park land. The first use of the word, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, was in 1921 in a Times article discussing the idea of a greenbelt around London. But ideas of non-developable natural land, open space, go back further. Muhammad in the 7th century prohibited

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36 Box 3. PLAN Boulder County Collection. Boulder Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO.
37 Box 1. PLAN Boulder County Collection. Boulder Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO.
38 Jane Jacobs’ life exemplifies the new activism surrounding urban planning.
39 Reissued in 1902 as Garden Cities of To-morrow
tree removal in a 12-mile long area surrounding Medina.\textsuperscript{40} Despite a long history, no precedent existed in America until Boulder voted for a greenbelt in 1967. More specifically, no city had a master plan which called for the acquisition of contagious parcels of land which were not intended for park use but instead to be maintained as natural areas surrounding the county.\textsuperscript{41}

PLAN Boulder would have to educate voters and administrators on their ideas in order to get them passed at the polls. During the next seven years, PLAN Boulder worked towards developing a greenbelt program. In these early days the idea of a greenbelt of natural space was quickly becoming the main issue for the organization.

**Blueline**

Boulder in the interwar years was a small agricultural-university town. During this period no comprehensive planning existed, except for the creation of zoning in 1928. The county continued to acquire mountain park land all while adding the best amenities for the time including electricity to auto parks. Boulder benefitted particularly from the Depression era New Deal funding. In contrast, the postwar decades saw rapid growth in population and real estate development.

The quality of maps and the large acreage of mountain parklands made the county an attractive place for the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression era. Boulder was one of the most active counties to employ the Civilian Conservation Corps in building bridges, roads,

\textsuperscript{40} Munawar Iqbal, *Islamic Perspectives On Sustainable Development* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). 27 As well reference to a greenbelt idea exists in the 13th century with Leviticus 24:34.
\textsuperscript{41} Certainly many of Denver’s Mountain Parks would fall under the definition of natural area or even open space. The difference between Boulder’s greenbelt idea and other cities is that the land was contiguous and designed to surround the county.
guard rails, picnic tables, benches, fireplaces, shelters, Boy Scout cabins, and an amphitheater on Flagstaff Mountain. The efforts of earlier preservationists, like Charles Campbell’s acquisition of Flagstaff Mountain, were greatly expanded upon, making Boulder among the best mountain parks towns in the country.

Boulder’s population grew rapidly through the post-war boom. The growth was brought about through the university’s expansion, the establishment of the National Bureau of Standards, and the completion of the Boulder-Denver Turnpike. The University expanded quickly because of the G. I. Bill which made a university education accessible to veterans. From 1946 to 1949 veterans made up half the student body with enrollment peaking in 1948 at 11,129 students.42 The expanded programs in physics and mathematics, driven by the G.I. Bill and the onset of the Cold War, were important for attracting federal labs to locate in Boulder later in the 1960s and 70s.

The construction of the Boulder-Denver Turnpike, now a part of U.S. 36, was conceived of by University of Colorado Professor Roderick Downing in the 1920s. His original proposition to the state legislature was ignored. But Professor Downing continued to use the possible highway as a case study in his civil engineering classes often sending students out to survey sites. This research on feasibility helped convince the legislature to act. Ground-breaking took place in 1950 and the turnpike was completed in 1952, with both the mayors of Boulder and Denver present, naming Professor Downing the “father” of the turnpike.

The expansion of the University of Colorado science departments required hiring new faculty. The city’s non-student population declined for the last time in the 1940s while the

student population nearly doubled. The student population was growing rapidly in the 1950s due to the G.I. Bill. Colorado law at the time required anyone with a high school diploma issued in the state to be accepted by the University.

The expansion of the University and the federal labs led to many new jobs in Boulder. This expansion brought people who would become activists for conservation such as Frank Havice, law professor Doris Havice, physicist Walter Orr Roberts, activist Janet Roberts, sociologist Elise Boulding, economist Kenneth Boulding, flood management expert Gilbert Wright, ecologist Oakleigh Thorne, and CU Professor Kenneth Wright. But most important for the changes to come in Boulder was Albert Bartlett, hired as an associate professor of physics in 1950, and mathematician Robert McKelvey. These people all arrived in Boulder because of the jobs provided by the University of Colorado and federal labs.

Al Bartlett is characteristic of these intellectuals moving to Boulder in the 50s and 60s. He saw the city’s population double in his first eight years of teaching. Professor Bartlett along with other faculty at the University began to consider the consequences of unquestioned growth for the city. Many of these people were drawn to Boulder, partly for its mountain backyard and small college-town environment. Kurt Gerstle, an Engineering professor, describes moving from Berkeley, California, “We got the maps out, my new wife and me, to see where the mountains were and wound up in Boulder, Colorado living in Chautauqua.” A typical description for the group of recreationally minded intellectuals moving to work at the university.

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43 Walter Orr Roberts worked originally at the University of Colorado and later become director of NCAR. His relationship with Bartlett was important for allowing NCAR to be an exception to the Blue Line Amendment.

44 Al Bartlett, Kurt Gerstle and Ruth Wright, "Al Bartlett With Kurt Gerstle And Ruth Wright Interview", Guy Errickson interview by , in person (Maria Rogers Oral History Program, 2002).
Concern over the loss of iconic landscapes, like the Flatirons, to development prompted a small group of University of Colorado professors to form the Blue Line Committee. These professors began to see increasing development of the city as detrimental to the qualities that had brought them there in the first place — primarily the mountains. The Blue Line was a legal boundary along the foothills above which no city services would be provided. The assumption was that the expense of drilling a well for water and septic tanks would be a large enough disincentive to prevent further development.

Two of the most influential members in the popular campaign were Al Bartlett and Robert Mc Kelvey. The idea of the Blue Line is attributed to Bob Mc Kelvey. The story goes that one night Al Bartlett was walking on university hill when Robert Mc Kelvey pulled up next to him on his bike and suggested, “We just have to do something about these mountains.” Soon after, they organized the first meeting of PLAN Boulder. Letters and oral interviews show that Robert Mc Kelvey often spoke about these concerns.

They developed a language which reflected their concern for environmental protection couched in populist rhetoric. Mc Kelvey suggested, in the debate for a Blue Line charter amendment, that the city was subsidizing wealthy housing developments by pumping water uphill. City services would be increasingly expensive the further up in elevation. Providing water uphill was a subsidy to housing developers paid for by the city. They argued that Boulderites, who enjoyed the mountains, had no obligation to subsidize the destruction of their view.

Mc Kelvey and Bartlett hiked the area of the foothills carefully noting features, elevations, and incline. Working with an attorney they produced a legal line at which no city services would be provided beyond. The 5750’ elevation, dubbed the Blue line, was chosen because it was the

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45 Al Bartlett, Kurt Gerstle and Ruth Wright, "Al Bartlett With Kurt Gerstle And Ruth Wright Interview", Guy Errickson interview by , in person (Maria Rogers Oral History Program, 2002).
height of the reservoir. In order to move water above the height of the reservoir pumping would be required. Members of the Committee for the Blue Line Charter Amendment argued this was fundamentally a subsidy of wealthy development in the foothills. They brought this recommendation to the city council, which disagreed. The city council at this time saw wealthy development of the foothills as profitable for the city.

After the rejection of the Blue Line Amendment by the city council, the Committee for the Blue Line started a petition, gathering enough signatures to force the city council to call a referendum within 30 to 60 days. Bartlett recalled that Pearl Street was far less busy in these years and it took hours to collect signatures. The campaign for the Blue Line Amendment was led by Bartlett while McKelvey was away at the University of Wisconsin for the summer. The Boulder *Daily Camera* supported the amendment along with other businesses around Pearl Street — no business opposed the amendment, nor the Chamber of Commerce. In less than two weeks, 2,592 signatures were gathered, which was more than twice the required number to put the issue on the ballot. The amendment was supported at the polls and the city charter amended in 1959.

From the beginning, McKelvey and Bartlett believed that the Blue Line would only be a temporary stop gap to restrain development along the foothills. Developers, at great expense, could build sewage and water systems independent of the city. Some developers considered bringing in water lines from Denver. Bartlett and McKelvey believed outright ownership of the land was the only way to permanently resist development.  

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46 The council chose in June to have the election on July 21, 1959.  
47 Albert Bartlett, Kurt Gerstle and Ruth Wright, "Al Bartlett With Kurt Gerstle And Ruth Wright Interview", Guy Errickson interview by , in person (Maria Rogers Oral History Program, 2002).  
One of the only exceptions to the Blue Line occurred in 1960, a year after its passage. In the winter of 1960, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, UCAR, wanted to locate its new research center above the Blue Line. The president of UCAR and head of NCAR, Walter Orr Roberts, wanted to preserve the natural quality of the building site. In 1960 he wrote to George Weber, Chairman of PLAN Boulder, saying the land would be preserved with public access — the building was supposed to blend in with the landscape as well. On January 31, 1961 a special election provided an exception for the construction of the NCAR building. The exception was made because NCAR’s permit was conditional on preserving two thirds of the property as natural land with public access. The deal was a compromise that believed some guaranteed land protection was better than no guarantee.

The Blue Line campaign brought record numbers of voters out to the polls and garnered 71% of the vote but this was only the beginning of a more comprehensive plan being asked for by Boulderites. The Blue Line city charter amendment helped the community to coalesce around issues of land conservation and built a coalition of citizens which would continue to work together towards a Greenbelt Program until the 1970s. Robert E. Turner, made City Manger in January 1960, created the Mayor’s Study Committee on Parks and Recreation in order to determine the best way to move forward. The committee’s study was submitted in October of 1960, reporting several reforms but did not mention open space land or greenbelts a single time.\(^{49}\) The report suggested the formation of a unified parks and recreation department, as well as a citizens’ advisory board. The committee’s recommendations were passed and the city charter was amended to consolidate the functions under one department. Before the city council

\(^{49}\) Report of the Mayor’s Study Committee on Parks and Recreation, September, 1960, City of Boulder, Colorado, Box 1, Albert Bartlett Collection, University of Colorado Library Archives.
voted on the issue, the committee’s recommendations were approved by PLAN Boulder. This is the beginning of the political power approval by PLAN Boulder would bring.
Enchanted Mesa Purchase

Conservationists and PLAN Boulder members resisted the threat of development on a 150 acre piece of land atop Enchanted Mesa and above the Blue Line by Kenneth Mirise. The land was originally threatened for development in 1955 but nothing came of it—. The owner of the land in 1955 seems to have been timid and very aware how difficult permeating would be. After holding on to the land for several years the parcel of land was sold to Mirise. The conflict over development of the site began in 1961 when an application was made to rezone the land from residential to commercial. Mirise wanted to build a luxury hotel with shops on the land.

Conservation groups and PLAN Boulder vehemently opposed development of the property. The city planning board officially recommended disapproval to the county planning board, the body that bore ultimate responsibility for deciding whether to rezone. PLAN Boulder members argued to the county planning board that the land was not suited for commercial development. An open letter published in the Daily Camera argued the land was remote, windy, and got dark early. Towards the end of the letter a single paragraph is devoted to suggesting the ecological importance of the area.

Before the county commissioners denied Mirise’s request for rezoning Mirise had filed a lawsuit against the city over an access road to his property. The trial started in 1961 after the county had denied rezoning. Negotiations took place out of court for two more years until a compromise over the road and boundary issues was eventually reached. While the negotiations were taking place over access roads to the property, conservationists were attempting to persuade the citizens of Boulder to purchase the Enchanted Mesa property. PLAN Boulder started the

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Committee for Enchanted Mesa to campaign for protecting the Flatirons and Mesa Trail area. The committee began to make arguments for the preservation of land premised upon the ecological diversity of the plant life and climate of the area. The committee and educational campaign was led by Oakleigh Thorne II, a Professor of Biology at the University of Colorado.

The Committee for Enchanted Mesa argued that the city needed to purchase Enchanted Mesa for park use in order to prevent future development. On January 21, 1962, when the issue of purchasing the land by the municipality came up at a city council meeting, close to a hundred people spoke in support of purchasing the property. The groundwork for conservation of the land had been led by University professors Oakleigh and Bartlett.52 Other organizations presented petitions at the council meeting and endorsed the land purchase idea. These organizations included the University of Colorado Hiking Club, The University Natural Areas Committee, and Rocky Mountain Rescue Group.

The University Natural Areas Committee was created in 1960 to help decide which areas were essential to the present and future needs of the University — primarily for ecological study. Oakleigh Thorne was the secretary of the committee and argued that if the University of Colorado lost the use of certain lands departmental research would be harmed. The committee urged the acquisition and preservation of key ecological areas.

The University committee issued a report which introduced the idea of open space into the debate over the Enchanted Mesa property. Their suggestion of open space was a combination of a natural area and a park. They suggested the area ought to be preserved without amenities and that depending upon the lands condition it could potentially be used for hiking trails. The committee’s report, submitted January 20, 1961, identified the Enchanted Mesa area as a natural

52 Daily Camera, January, 21, 1962
area to be preserved for its ecological value. The public debate for purchasing the Enchanted Mesa land began to include ideas of natural areas. The public began suddenly using arguments premised upon ecology saying the land ought to be purchased for its ecological significance and geological reputation. The unique geology had produced rare living ecology. The University ought to protect land west of the Blue Line as possible.

The Natural Areas Committee would become the Special Committee on Park Sites and Open Spaces. Again this group of university scientists of which three were founding members of PLAN Boulder issued recommendations for acquisition. The committee conducted extensive field trips and study sessions creating detailed ecological and geological maps. A report issued in 1963 recommends lands based upon “distinguished scenic character” and “greatest potential for natural recreational use.”

The Nature Conservancy sent scientists to write a report on the value of the Enchanted Mesa area. Professor Thorne and McKelvey hiked the area with the visitors which was written up in the Camera. The Daily Camera supported the purchasing of Enchanted Mesa and wrote several pieces in support of its acquisition. On July 3, 1962 the Camera headlined an editorial “Let’s Not Pass Up the Chance.”

During the debate over purchasing Enchanted Mesa several open space preservationist groups appeared including the Thorne Ecological Foundation, the Boulder Trail Association, and Citizens for Enchanted Mesa. All of the groups were founded by university employees. The Citizens for Enchanted Mesa ran an education campaign to convince the general public to

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53 Robert McKelvey, Oakleigh Thorne II, and Kurt H. Gerstle  
support a bond issue to pay for buying the property. Robert McKelvey described the members of Citizens for Enchanted Mesa as “university people.”  

Unlike the future greenbelt campaign, opposition developed over the issue of purchasing the Enchanted Mesa property. The Chamber of Commerce came out against the bond issue. A few anti-greenbelt ads argued the money should be spent on improving existing parks instead of acquiring more parkland. These ads were only run in the month of the campaign and no other evidence exists to document organized opposition to the purchase. The Citizens for Enchanted Mesa on the other hand ran dozens of ads in newspapers, radio, and hosted hiking tours of the areas affected.

The bond issue to purchase the Enchanted Mesa passed with 53.6 percent of the vote on July 10, 1962. But discussion over the price of the land continued until 1964, costing $20,000 more than the original bond issue. Citizens for Enchanted Mesa met again after two years hiatus and raised $5,000. The city used funding from Parks and Recreation to pay for the rest. The campaign was successful and the land became an undeveloped park.

The Enchanted Mesa purchase was a wide scale citizen led movement. It reflected new values and ideas into the public discourse. These values appreciated natural areas for their aesthetic, ecological, biological, and geological significance. The most radical development was that land had been acquired by the municipality to be maintained as natural area open space. This established a precedent and generated popular consciousness which was essential to the passage of a more radical and aggressive program of open space — the idea of a contiguous greenbelt of open space insulating the county.

Members of Citizens for Enchanted Mesa and University Natural Areas Committee showed that open space was being threatened. Scientific interest of an area became part of public discourse because the Enchanted Mesa campaign. Open space, natural areas, had to be protected. The idea that municipal action was necessary to prevent perceived destructive development was popularized in the Enchanted Mesa campaign.
Greenbelt

Bartlett and Ruth Wright, head of PLAN Boulder, knew that a successful greenbelt program required the support of the city administration from city council to the City Manager. The greenbelt program was an expensive and seemingly radical idea. It would require large sums of money which would have to come in some way from taxes. Each election brought in more pro-greenbelt supporters until the election of 1967, when several seats and the greenbelt amendment were on the ballot.

Yet, in 1964 the greenbelt program was not inevitable and the exact direction Boulder would take was still being decided. That year work towards a comprehensive planning document began officially when City Manager Turner appointed James Bowers as planning director. Exactly what the future direction of the city would take depended upon the plan Bower would write and the city council would support.

Bowers was tasked with creating a new comprehensive planning document. The city had been relying upon a plan written in 1957. Between 1957 and 1964 the city's population and physical footprint had both doubled.\textsuperscript{56} The planning director was obligated to create a new plan outlining the future needs and growth of the city. Bowers began surveying Boulder citizens about their problems and ideas for the future of Boulder. The reports show increasing demand for “something to be done about open space.”\textsuperscript{57}

The 1960’s resulted in major changes culturally and academically. Urban planning was an entirely different discipline by the end of the 1960’s. Jane Jacobs published \textit{The Death and}

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\textsuperscript{56} City of Boulder Planning Board, Plan for Planning, 1965, 6.
\textsuperscript{57} Opinion Boulder, A Report from the City Planning Office, Boulder, Colorado, January, 1967, Box 1, Albert Bartlett Collection.
Life of Great American Cities in 1961 and in the closing year of 1969 Ian McHarg published Design with Nature. In 1964, the month the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, CU professor Kenneth E. Boulding published his work, The Meaning of the Twentieth Century: The Great Transition. While Jacobs and McHarg had changed urban planning Boulding’s work changed the conversation of sustainability. Adam Rome wrote that, “The Meaning of the Twentieth Century is no longer well known, yet Boulding was key in framing the issue of sustainability.”58 The book argued that a sustainable civilization would require more than technological innovation, such as solar panels, but instead would need social innovation. These social innovations would be the adoption of new values and aesthetics. Boulder had begun to express these new values of ecology in the Enchanted Mesa campaign and the fact that Boulding gave talks that summer on his work ensures that Boulderites were keenly aware of this new framing.

Kenneth Boulding’s ideas of sustainability and ecology were influential in economics and his presence in Boulder was likely a contribution to growing environmental awareness. He was invited to teach a course on agricultural economics at University of Colorado in the summer of 1964.59 During his stay he became friends with members of PLAN Boulder including Albert Bartlett and attended a PLAN Boulder meeting.60 Kenneth and Elise Boulding, his wife, both moved to Boulder in 1967 to work at the University of Colorado.

Not only the activist intellectuals in Boulder but Boulder citizens in general were convinced by 1965 that protection of the mountain backdrop in a natural state was important. Record turnouts to vote “yes” for the Blue Line Amendment and the Enchanted Mesa purchase

59 Course Syllabus, 1964, box 198, Kenneth Boulding Collection. The course was very much in line with Bartlett’s courses which asked students to find scientific solutions to environmental problems.
show the growing popularity of this belief in Boulder. But the foothills were not the only areas being developed. Suburban development was consuming land across the state and within Boulder County it was happening at an alarming rate. Certainly Boulder citizens had supported protections of the foothills and mountain backdrop but in 1965 how exactly the city planned on dealing with suburban expansion elsewhere was not yet clear.

Converting land into open space was becoming more popular among Boulderites. Even among suburbanites open space advocacy and support was popular. The threat of leapfrog development did more than destroy older cities like Boulder; it surrounded earlier suburbs destroying their views as well. Of note is that recent immigrants to Boulder living on fringe development came to support the greenbelt program.

PLAN Boulder members like Albert Bartlett along with city administrators like Robert Turner believed that the Blue Line Amendment could not be used effectively in the rest of Boulder County. Limiting extension of city services was only going to slow development. Turner studied Denver’s annexation process and discovered that Denver selectively extended city services to guide growth. Turner crafted a plan based upon Denver’s — known as the “Spokes of the Wheel.” A pay-as-you-go plan which directed infrastructure improvements in order to guide growth. The “spokes of the wheel” were lines of utilities extended outward from the city of Boulder. Only two “spokes” were completed before the council was turned over to unanimous pro-greenbelt administrators. The pro-greenbelt council members being elected saw the

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63 City of Boulder Planning Department, The Service Area Concept: A Program for Boulder’s Planned Development, 2. Albert Bartlett Collection, University of Colorado Archives.
“spokes of the wheel” as a pro-growth plan. In truth the plan failed to prevent suburban leapfrog development but instead would have only helped to mitigate it.

The new City Manager in 1965, Robert W. Quinlan, inherited Turner’s plans, along with Bowers as planning director. But Quinlan resigned by November 1966 due to frustrations between himself and Bowers. Quinlan was a traditional City Manager and rejected Bowers educational slideshow and tree-planting programs as well as under grounding of utilities.65 Bowers began working with Dwain Miller, the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, on creating a new comprehensive plan. Miller was in charge of the greenbelt proposal. Apparently, Quinlan referred to the greenbelt program as “the stupidest idea he had ever heard” and that the program had no chance of being adopted.66 Bowers resigned as planning director and soon after city council fired Quinlan. A meeting of the city council and the parks and recreation board met a week later and Miller presented his and Bowers’ greenbelt plan. City council voted 100 percent to support the plan. They requested the Parks and Recreation Department write a proposal and seek appraisals for land purchases.

New city council members and a new mayor elected in 1966 meant an “activist government”.67 The newly elected council members were ready to adopt the unprecedented greenbelt program but the question of popular support as a ballot initiative still loomed. The city council created the City Council Committee for Thoroughfares and Greenbelts with mayor Robert W. Knecht as the chairman. Knecht was up for reelection to another six year term and had made the greenbelt program central to his campaign including it in advertisements.

65 Bowers had been presenting a slide show since 1965 about issues needing to be addressed in Boulder.
The city councils committee ran advertisements alongside the Citizens for Greenbelts. The city council’s campaign focused on the economics of the greenbelt program, suggesting that “it will not affect local business.” The advertisements argued the law was equitable because tourists and students would help pay the bill — the city as well lowered property taxes to incentives the program. Citizens for Greenbelts ran advertisements alongside with photographs of Los Angeles with large print asking the reader how the area once looked and responding, “Few can remember now.” The campaign by Bartlett and McKelvey expressed fears of urban sprawl consuming the region.

An educational campaign, run by Bartlett and McKelvey, was named the Citizens for Greenbelts. The campaigns between the private citizens and the city government were closely aligned. The Citizens for Greenbelts was established at a PLAN Boulder meeting which hosted Tedesco, the City Manager, as the invited speaker. The division between city official and activist was not one the City Manager thought important. Tedesco recalls having signs put up at major street intersections that read “Tired of waiting at lights? Vote Yes on Open Space.” He then had the red lights adjusted to take twice as long.

PLAN Boulder had brought up the issue of a greenbelt program at their first meeting in 1959 and in 1966 the city government had initiated an investigation into its feasibility. PLAN Boulder “typical of academics” hosted a conference in 1967, “Greenbelts, Why and How?” designed for Tedesco to attend. The conference invited activists, planning officials, and city

70 Tedesco, Ted. 2009. Interview by Timothy Plass. Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Boulder Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO. He chuckled during the interview at this and other activities he did to pass greenbelts.
council members together at the National Bureau of Standards for the sole purpose of talking about greenbelts.

The newly appointed City Manager Francis S. “Ted” Tedesco had arrived two weeks earlier and activists like Ruth Wright and Albert Bartlett knew they need to enroll him in the idea of a greenbelt program. Tedesco attended a PLAN Boulder the week he arrived even before his official position began. He attended the conference, not speaking once but listening throughout. Mayor Knecht opened the conference declaring “when man loses nature, he is himself lost.”

Tedesco left the conference believing that open space needed to be protected and quickly. Soon afterwards Dwain Miller, Director of the Parks and Recreation Department issued his report “Greenbelt Program, Boulder, Colorado” which was the most coherent legal and practical analysis of implementing a greenbelt program thus far. Of note was Miller’s emphasis on direct acquisition of land. His report argues that greenbelts would control sprawl and that municipalities had the legal precent to act in protecting a places beauty. He suggested that open space land would “greatly complement,” parkland even if the public could not directly use the land.

On November 7, 1967 Boulder adopted the Open Space Sales Tax Amendment with 61% of citizens voting in favor. An estimated 90 percent of eligible voters turned out. Tedesco had combined the problem of bad roads and the desire for open space into the “Greenbelts and Major

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72 Transcript. Box 2. PLAN Boulder County Collection. Boulder Carnegie Library, Boulder, CO.
74 Daily Camera. 1967. “Record High Vote In City” Daily Camera. An estimated 90% of eligible voters turned out to vote.
75 Interested was likely high because legalizing alcohol within the county was also on the ballot.
Thoroughfares” amendment. The amendment created a one percent sales tax, sixty percent was dedicated towards road improvement and forty percent for a greenbelt acquisitions. Tedesco recounted later that most roads were still dirt and that the money for thoroughfare improvement was guaranteed to pass. Unlike the Enchanted Mesa purchase no opposition organized against the amendment.

The sales tax made Boulder unique. Open space programs existed in other cities, although definitions of ‘natural state’ differ widely, but Boulder was the first place in the United States to use a sales tax to finance such a program. The program passed at the polls despite the estimated price tag ranging from fifteen million dollars to twenty-five million dollars to purchase the land for a greenbelt. By combining the the issue of road improvements Tedesco avoided opposition from the Chamber of Commerce and other business interests who typically would oppose increased sales tax.

At the same time leading up to the November 7, 1967 ballot vote PLAN Boulder members were running an educational campaign to support the amendment. Ruth Wright presented over a thousand signatures supporting the amendment, ensuring it was added to the ballot. Bartlett wrote op-ed pieces in the Camera and even the Gadfly, a student read newspaper, asking for support. Bartlett had copies of the Greenbelt Program for Boulder, Colorado printed and kept on reserve in Norlin library. He wrote hundreds of letters mailing them out urging

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76 Tedesco planned the timing of the amendment as well to coincide with several seats on council being voted for. This ensured that candidates would have to take a stance on greenbelts.
77 Humorously, the contradiction of funding more concrete and open space at the same time seemingly went unacknowledged.
citizens to vote for the greenbelt program. A drawing of the Flatirons, resurrected from the 1959 Blue Line campaign, was printed on each letter.
Conclusion

Boulder’s Greenbelt program in reaction to increasing development and suburban sprawl was unusual. As early as the mountain parks acquisitions the university played a role in land use in Boulder, particularly in conservation. In many ways the university has influenced the city and county of Boulder. This thesis demonstrated how the location of the Boulder-Denver turnpike, the non-existent development above 5750’ elevation, and the greenbelt itself are all evidence of the impact the university has had on the place of Boulder.

Understanding the main actors for the creation of the Greenbelt is important. It demonstrates to some extant the subtle and immeasurable impact institutions like a university can have on a community. Yet questions remain about the intention of the greenbelt which require further research. How did PLAN Boulder members and university faculty expect the greenbelt to effect affordable housing? How did the conservation of land evolve into the Slow Growth Ordinance in 1976. This study ends in 1967 but several other comparatively unusual laws are passed over the next ten years which require more historical study.

The political movement towards a the Greenbelt reflects broader trends towards an ecological perspective. In 1969 Ian McHarg published Design with Nature which built the intellectual foundation of the ecological method for urban planning — using the environment to help make decisions. Boulder’s Greenbelt predates McHarg’s ideas and shows how the environmental movement was not confined to federal acts but was a local movement.

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81 As well it caused every landscape architecture program in the country to reinvent themselves.
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