

Colorado Preservation, Inc.'s Saving Places 2014 Conference

THE EILER HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD IN BOJON TOWN IN PUEBLO, CO

The Perfect Storm

Definition – Actual phenomenon that happens to occur in such a confluence resulting in an event of unusual magnitude.

1990 - My husband, Joe, and I move to Pueblo. Joe was born and raised in Bojon Town and he immediately notices a **Steady Breeze** blowing.

- Change in Demographics – What was once primarily a Slovenian neighborhood with owner occupied homes is moving towards non-owner occupied homes with lower income levels.

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1991 – Joe and I purchase the family business, Eilers' Place. We are third generation owners and I am immersed in the culture of the neighborhood with three generations of families socializing in the bar. I know most of our customers by nicknames only and I spend hours listening to stories and histories of the families who grew up in the neighborhood. I begin to love this neighborhood.

2001 – I-25 Re-alignment discussions begin. **Winds are starting to blow.**

- The re-alignment of the highway could either negatively or positively impact our neighborhood. We're anticipating a loss of homes but trying to mitigate the impacts with positive input.

2006 – 2008 - Joe and I sell Eilers Place and move across the street to the home where Joe was born and raised. **Winds are still blowing at a steady pace.**

- The 1100 Block of Eilers has 11 homes, five of which are family and 7 of which are either original owners or 2nd generation owners. The addition of a garage requires a change in zoning.
- We meet Wade Broadhead, Pueblo City Planner, who becomes a friend and will dramatically and positively impact our lives and the neighborhood.
- Wade suggests that our block might qualify to become an historic district.

12/2008 – I-25 re-alignment public meeting held - **Winds are building in intensity.**

- 62 homes demolished
- No access from Mesa Ave into St. Mary's Church. 600 member church with alley access only
- Shocked and appalled. CDOT says they have made a mistake
- The need to be aware of upcoming meetings and release of EIS
- A small group of neighbors are starting to discuss what we are seeing.

2009 – 2011 – Historic designation area expands to include the 200 & 300 blocks of E. Mesa Ave. & St. Mary's church. Winds are intense but steady and the "Eye of the Storm is starting to form."

- Residents are meeting to gather information about Wade's idea. Do we qualify as an historic district? Wade believes we do. He believes our area is unique and extremely well preserved and he's excited about the stories he's hearing.
- Historic Survey is proposed, residents agree to proceed and Wade applies for a Grant from Dan Corson at History Colorado.
- Our little area goes thru the process of deciding on a name. Suggestions are solicited and then voted on. We will now be known as "Eiler Heights."
- We are becoming organized. Fundraising projects, in preparation for the Historic Survey, are in the works.
- Even before the grant has final approval, Wade Broadhead, Mary Therese Anstey, Historitecture and Dawn DiPrince, El Pueblo Museum, propose a "Memoir Writing Workshop" for Residents. Let's keep in mind that Wade, Mary Therese and Dawn are already working hard on a project that has no funding. What an inspirational and passionate group they are.
- We learn how unique and special this project is going to be because we are recording not only the fascinating architectural aspects of our homes and the church but we have expanded the survey to include the personal histories of past and present residents thru the use of Memoir Workshops and oral histories. This is the first time that Historitecture will incorporate these oral and written histories into one of their historic/architectural the surveys.
- We're all feeling excited about the project. A ray of sunshine and a glimmer of hope that the Historic Survey will help stabilize the neighborhood and help stave off the I-25 Project. A sense of pride is starting to show.

11 thru 12/2011 – EIS is released – Intensified winds are forming and defining themselves into a Category 3 storm.

- 2 alternatives are presented:
 1. Existing - 33 homes demolished, RR will have to be moved
 2. Modified – 52 homes demolished. Preferred Alternative.
- No access to St. Mary's Church off Mesa Ave, the main street right in front of the church.

12/7/2011 – Meeting with CDOT about EIS

- Small group of residents come together to try to get answers
- Learned that public comments will only be accepted until 12/19.
- Our small group worked day and night to put together a presentation to give to City Council, Father Becino and Residents. We then contacted residents to write letters and went going door to door with petitions.
- We had exactly 11 days but our group was able to submit everything by the 12/19th deadline.

12/21/2011 – We managed to put together a neighborhood meeting with CDOT

- Lots of options were discussed but we learned it was all futile because CDOT told us that moving the RR was not an option. So in truth only their preferred alternative was viable
- CDOT not negotiating in "Good Faith."
- Again, we are stunned and shocked by what we are seeing and hearing. How could this happen?

2012 – The "Eye of the Storm" is further defined.

- The Historic Survey made possible by History Colorado is providing us with a sea of calm.
 1. The Memoir Workshops are bringing past and current residents together to reminisce. Great stories and memories abound. It is an amazing dynamic to witness because one persons' story overlaps with another and another and another and more stories emerge. We all laugh and smile and have a good time.
 2. Wade, Mary Therese and Dawn DiPrince are still working with just a hope and a prayer.
- The I-25 re-alignment still looms. Meetings, letters and organizing efforts continue and frustrations are at their highest. Nothing is changing. C-DOT won't budge.
- But...residents are working together. And then.....a phone call from the EPA

4/2012 – Winds are increasing in intensity to a Category 4 Storm

- The neighborhood is contacted by the EPA. Their goal is to list our neighborhood as a Superfund Site.
- Over the next year and a half, we start to gather on a regular basis to study and learn about what's involved in a Superfund designation.
- Countless hours are spent asking questions, giving presentations to City Council, organizing meetings.
- Our stress levels are off the chart. The implications of a listing are hard to comprehend.

4/2013 – The Eye of the Storm Forms – We have our first meeting of the Eiler Heights Neighborhood Assoc.

- 23 Residents are in attendance. We put together officers and a board of directors.
- We have an agenda that includes the Historic Survey, filing for 501C3 status, proposed Superfund listing and the I-25 re-alignment. We have a mission statement, a website and are working on a neighborhood bulletin board.
- We meet the first Tuesday of each month and our goal is to make sure that we work together to accomplish our goals.

4/2013 – We have a meeting with CDOT and in a very subdued way they tell us that they don't have enough money to re-align our section of the highway and that they will be going north instead.

- Is it possible, have we won? We truly believe our efforts made a difference because our section of the highway was always the priority. Estimates are 15 to 20 years before they will touch us...enough time for us to design a better alternative.

8/2013 – CDOT releases the final EIS. Again we respond with public comments.

9/2013 – The neighborhood receives the funding for the Historic Survey and we have a front porch social to kick-off this great moment.

- Wade, Mary Therese and Dawn breath a sigh of relief and we are even more excited than ever. Neighbors are engaged in the project to the point where Mary Therese and Wade have soo much information that the Survey is being labeled at Part 1.

Ever looming is the EPA – Winds are again increasing and moving towards a Category 5 Storm.

- The EPA agrees to two blood lead level studies of our children.

- A plan and time line is put into place by the Neighborhood Association and City Council. Once the studies are done and the results are released, EPA has agreed to, with our help, put together a pro and con fact sheet that is to be distributed to every resident and property owner. Once everyone has all the information, we are going to have a meeting to hopefully decide what the neighborhood wants to do, either for or against the listing.
- We are anticipating a decision by the end of February or the 1st of March.

12/10/2013 – The Category 5 Storm is in full force and raging. A political move by some members of City Council and the County Commissioners has forced a city wide meeting. The purpose is to list us as a Superfund Site.

- Presentations were given by the EPA, The Health Dept., two Doctors, City Council and County Commissioners. The neighborhood was not allowed to give any kind of presentation. We were told that each of us would have maybe three minutes to say something.
- Decision was made by City Council and the County Commissioners to write a Letter to the Governor” recommending the listing.
- The neighborhood was told that they would be involved in that process but the “Letter” was written without us even seeing it. Our Councilwoman, Sandy Daff, was horrified and again we went before City Council asking that the Letter not be sent until they included input from the neighborhood. A compromise was reached.

1/7/14 – The Eiler Heights Neighborhood Association Meeting.

- With help from Sandy Daff, a flier was sent to every resident in the neighborhood about the meeting and we had a great turn out.
- We gave residents and property owners, only, a form to list their top 5 expectations for a superfund listing.
- Many questions and much discussion made for great input for our residents.
- Residents were encouraged to write individual letters which were included in the neighborhoods’ “Letter to the Governor.”

12/31/2013 – Letter to Governor sent from City Council and County Commissioners

1/9/2014 – Letter to Governor sent from the Eiler Heights Neighborhood Association, Sandy Daff and BAND

- The letter included all of the handwritten forms from residents, Residents’ “Letters to the Governor,” a comprehensive Neighborhood Expectations Sheet, etc.

1/21/14 – Letter from Governor Hickenlooper to the EPA supporting the listing, “as long as certain protections are put in place to be responsive to the concerns of the local community that would be affected the most by designation of a federal Superfund site.” We stress the importance of EPA addressing the concerns and expectations raised by the Eiler Heights community in the January 9, 2014 letter and the included Guidelines for the Superfund Designation developed at the January 6, 2014 neighborhood association meeting.”

- It is apparent that Governor Hickenlooper has listened to us and is responsive to our input.
- There’s no turning back now. We are pushing hard for a 5 year clean-up but the EPA’s track record seems to be 10 to 15 to 20 years.
- Needless to say, we have our work cut out for us.

In conclusion, I realize that the negative confluences, I-25 and the EPA, have come together in our neighborhood to create this perfect storm but I also realize that positive confluences have also come together to create a “Perfect Storm” that is really a force to be reckoned with, the Eiler Heights neighborhood.

We are organized, we are involved and, whatever it takes, we will work together to make sure, as our mission statement outlines:

We will:

- Enhance the quality of our neighborhood
- Encourage each and every one of us to be a participant in our neighborhood
- Work together with residents, business and local governments to improve the beauty and safety for all
- Encourage communication, cooperation and friendliness among residents
- Encourage everyone to get to know their neighbors.

We will do our part to make living here a place where you want to live and where others would like to live.

Our thanks go out to Wade Broadhead, Dan Corson, Mary Therese Anstey, Adam Thomas, Dawn DiPrince and Pueblo City Council President, Sandy Daff

EH84