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Utopian Urbanism

Assignment 1

1/29/25

Good Urbanism? So Close to Campus? I Think So!

Ruby Hill Park, a mere 2.5 miles from where we sit in Room 154 on the first floor of Sturm Hall, spans 88 acres with views of both Downtown Denver and the Rocky Mountains. This park serves as a major recreational resource for the surrounding neighborhoods as well as visitors who flock there for its diverse offerings. Acquired in 1954 by the City and County of Denver, the land was purchased to create a public park dedicated to recreation and community use. The name itself originates from the red stones found in the nearby Platte River during the 19th-century gold rush. Ruby Hill Park exemplifies good urbanism by balancing natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and community engagement in a way that benefits both local residents and the broader Denver community. (Denverite, 2021)

A key feature of the park is its high bluff, which provides a panoramic view of the entire Denver skyline. Historically utilized by Native American groups such as the Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes, it offered them a strategic view over the entire valley and close proximity to the South Platte River, a great source of water, food, and transportation. This long-standing historical significance demonstrates Ruby Hill's persistent importance in the Denver landscape and community. Today, these panoramic views are one aspect of the park that draws visitors looking for a retreat from urban life.

Surrounding the park are the neighborhoods of Ruby Hill, Overland to the north, Athmar Park to the east, Mar Lee to the west, and Harvey Park to the southwest. These neighborhoods contribute to the accessibility of the park and reflect the different communities that benefit from the park's community and recreational amenities. Ruby Hill features a mix of single-family homes, while Athmar Park is known for its mid-century homes and local businesses. Overland is primarily known for its proximity to the South Platte River Trail and Overland Golf Course. Mar Lee offers a mix of residential homes and small parks, contributing to a strong sense of community, while Harvey Park is a larger neighborhood known for mid-century homes and green spaces. The southwest side of the park borders a small but busy industrial area, where outdoor picnic tables offer employees the opportunity to enjoy nature. The park seamlessly integrates into the center of a dynamic urban area, providing opportunities for people to escape urban life for a second and enjoy all that the park has to offer.

Within the park itself, there is a wide range of outdoor activities catering to all types of people. Since its acquisition by the City and County of Denver, the area has gradually been developed with picnic areas, playgrounds, walking and running trails, as well as



People enjoying Ruby Hill Rail Yard

sports fields. In 2007, the Ruby Hill Rail Yard was developed as a free terrain park for skiers and snowboarders, offering an accessible way to have some winter fun without the lengthy commute to the mountains.



Outdoor Concert at Levitt Pavilion

This fun winter activity was developed in collaboration with Winter Park resort and allows Ruby Hill Park to remain an active community resource throughout the year. The park also boasts one of Denver's largest sledding hills,

drawing in visitors ranging from children to college students each winter. Another notable community aspect of the park is Levitt Pavilion, an open-air amphitheater built in 2017. This amphitheater hosts free events and concerts throughout the year, drawing in large crowds looking to enjoy community events. This addition to the park helps cement its role as a thriving community destination. Overall, Ruby Hill Park thrives as one of Denver's top urban parks, offering a mix of recreational opportunities, community events, and historical significance. (Levitt Pavilion Denver website)

Good urbanism, to me, is a space that fosters lively, sustainable, and livable urban environments. Within a city, there should be spaces that promote human connectivity and collaboration by prioritizing walkability and well-connected pathways. According to Jane Jacobs, cities should prioritize human connectivity through walkable spaces that encourage civic engagement. (Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*) Similarly, Kevin Lynch's concept of urban legibility emphasizes the importance of landmarks and clear spatial organization, both of which are embodied in Ruby Hill Park's distinct natural features and recreational infrastructure. (Lynch, *Three Normative Theories*)

Civic life is the main component of a city and so spaces that promote good urbanism are essential to a lively and interconnected community. Integrating green spaces and efficient public transit fosters both environmental sustainability and economic growth, which contribute to good urbanism. By prioritizing people over anything else and creating environments that encourage social interaction, cities can become more inclusive, sustainable, and dynamic. Ultimately, good urbanism is about building communities that not only meet the functional needs of residents but also enhance their sense of belonging and overall quality of life.

Ruby Hill Park serves as a model of good urbanism by demonstrating how public spaces can be designed to enhance community engagement and environmental integration. Located within a primarily residential area and bordering industrial zones, the park acts as a connector between different parts of the city. It provides a shared space where diverse groups can gather. Its extensive trail network and connection to the South Platte River Greenway promotes walking and bike accessibility, reducing the dependence on cars and encouraging more sustainable forms of transit. The park's free cultural and recreational resources ensure access to social activities, making it an inclusive space that fosters civic life. As Charles Wolfe describes in his exploration of cities, successful public spaces benefit from people's observations of their surroundings, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. (Wolfe, *Seeing the Better City, Making a Better Place*) Ruby Hill exemplifies this awareness by balancing man-made and natural environments, preserving its rolling hills and natural vegetation while integrating structures like the amphitheater and sports facilities. This combination of green space, entertainment, and

infrastructure designed for public use represents the standards of a livable and interconnected city. Ruby Hill Park shows how thoughtful urban planning can create spaces that serve both the environment and local communities.

While the park exemplifies good urbanism, there are opportunities to enhance its role as an accessible public space. Improving night-time safety through better lighting along trails could encourage greater use of the park after dark, making it a safer space for visitors. Additionally, incorporating public art installations could further strengthen community engagement while celebrating the park's landscape. Expanding public transit connections or implementing a scooter or bike-share station near the park's entrances could also enhance accessibility, ensuring that more people can easily reach and enjoy the space. These improvements would not only work to emphasize Ruby Hill's existing strengths, but also to reinforce its role as a sustainable, inclusive, and community-driven example of urban design within Denver.

Ruby Hill Park serves as a compelling example of good urbanism, illustrating how public spaces can serve as lively, dynamic, and sustainable resources within a city. Through its balance of natural beauty, recreation, and community events, the park fosters connectivity, accessibility, and civic engagement for residents across the city. Its integration into surrounding neighborhoods, pedestrian and bike-friendly infrastructure, and year-round resources demonstrate how urban spaces can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of a city while promoting social well-being. Ruby Hill embodies many of the core principles of an ideal urban space. Ultimately, its success reinforces the importance of designing cities that prioritize people and strengthen communities and offers a model for

future urban development that is both functional and sustainable. So, if you haven't yet, I recommend checking out Ruby Hill Park and all that it has to offer.