

Working Toward the Future

Workplace of the Future, hosted by ULI Colorado, June 6, 2013

Because Denver is a hotbed for Millennials, the city is becoming a great proving ground for workplace designs aimed at helping companies recruit and retain employees.

Everyone on the two panels at Thursday's ULI Colorado event — from developers to architects to interior designers and those in charge of office furnishings — agreed on three things. Going forward, workplaces will need to be flexible, adaptable and collaborative. More than 200 ULI members and guests attended the event held on the 47th floor of 1801 California, the former Qwest building in downtown Denver.

The benefits of doing that?

- Businesses can expand and contract.
- Employees can arrange their own spaces as they want to (what Jan Johnson of Workplace Resources Allsteel, Inc. calls a “hackable workspace”).
- More and more square footage in offices will be devoted to spaces where teams can convene and co-create (a percentage that has risen in many cases from 50 percent to 85 percent, according to interior designer Marc Herndon of RNL).

All this can play out through different models, illustrated by the good-natured squabbling that broke out among participants on both panels. These include Brookfield commercial's \$56M capital investment to reinvent the high-rise (1801 California St., which the group toured Thursday), to the ex-urban corporate campus thoughtfully integrated into the surrounding community (Fentress' new Charles Schwab project in Lone Tree), to the new cool kid on the block—the projects springing up around LoDo and the Central Platte Valley and, of course, Union Station, which is morphing before everyone's eyes. (Says Gordy Stofer of Hines, “We have a lot to thank the city and County of Denver for. This wouldn't be happening without their support for Union Station.”)

Larry King of Interior Architects presented an award-winning concept to build a modular office of the future in Seattle, using components built off site, assembled on site, and growing space as needed into an eventual high-rise. (This project is described in an award-winning book available on Amazon. http://www.amazon.com/Office-Building-Future-Pickard-Chilton/dp/1864705027/ref=sr_1_1_title_0_main?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1370713259&sr=1-1&keywords=Office+of+the+Future)

Amy Cara of East-West Partners described her firm's transition from a resort/residential developer to doing office buildings in Denver, including the newly announced Triangle Building near Union Station.

Perhaps the most radical idea of the day came from Chris Crosby of Nichols Partnership, which has been a driving force behind the innovative **Galvanize** workspace. With more than \$500

million of development under their belts (including Clayton Lane and Spire), Nichols has a whole new take on office space, which they call return on community, or ROC. Their approach focuses on context and uses standards such as WalkScore, BikeScore and CommunityScore, which moderator Ray Pittman of CBRE teased were terms he had not come across before. Crosby also emphasized that developers of the future will focus more of the layout of the space and communal workspaces rather than raw square footage and fancy boardrooms.

Pittman and others might be in for a surprise. If the true workplace of the future is going to be oriented to the needs of workers, Crosby just might prove himself to be a prophet.

— *Val Moses is a writer on design and planning issues in Denver.*

Powerpoints from our developer and design trends panels are available at <http://colorado.uli.org>