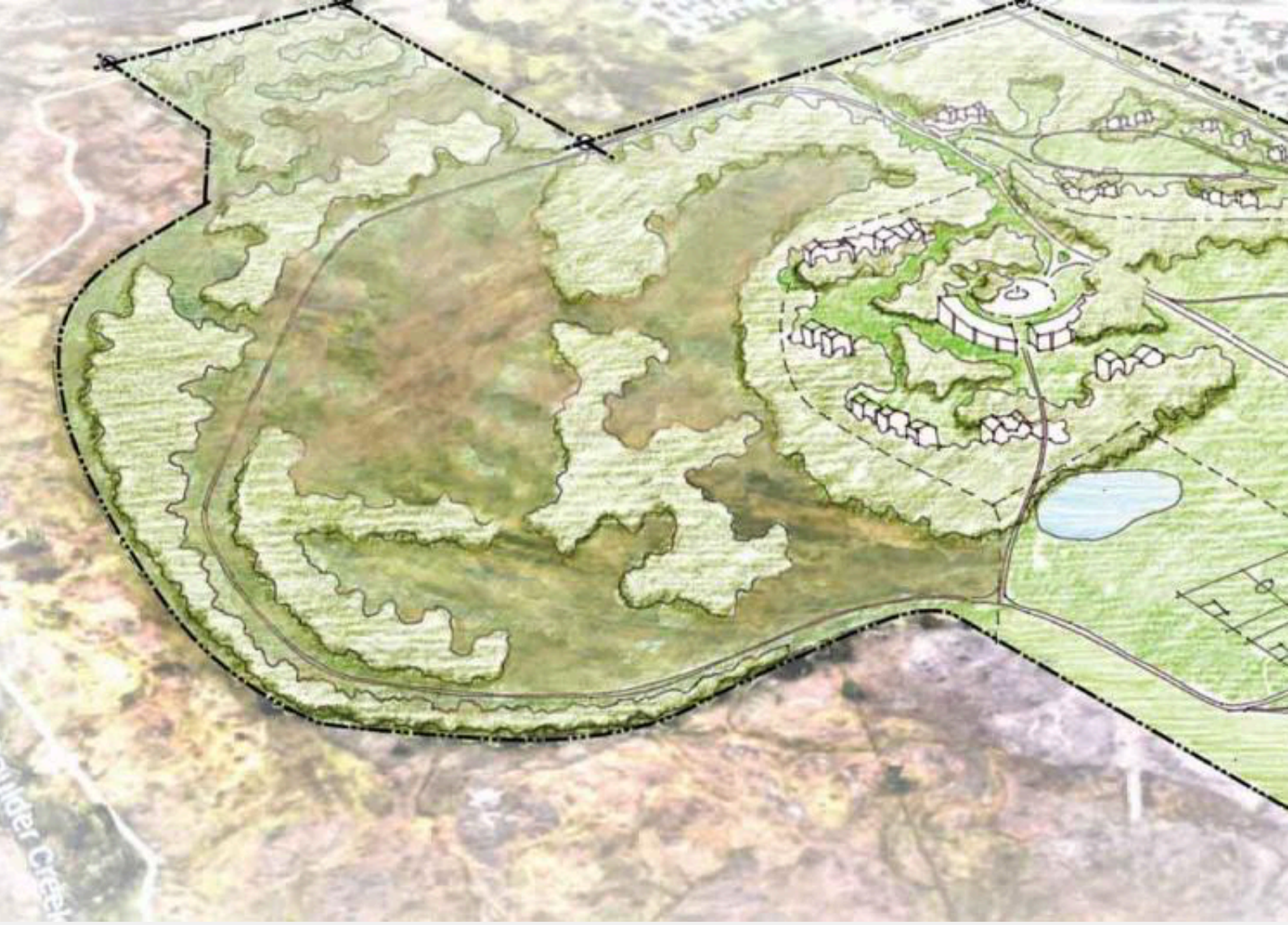

CU BOULDER SOUTH

The annexation project unveiling.
What is really going on.

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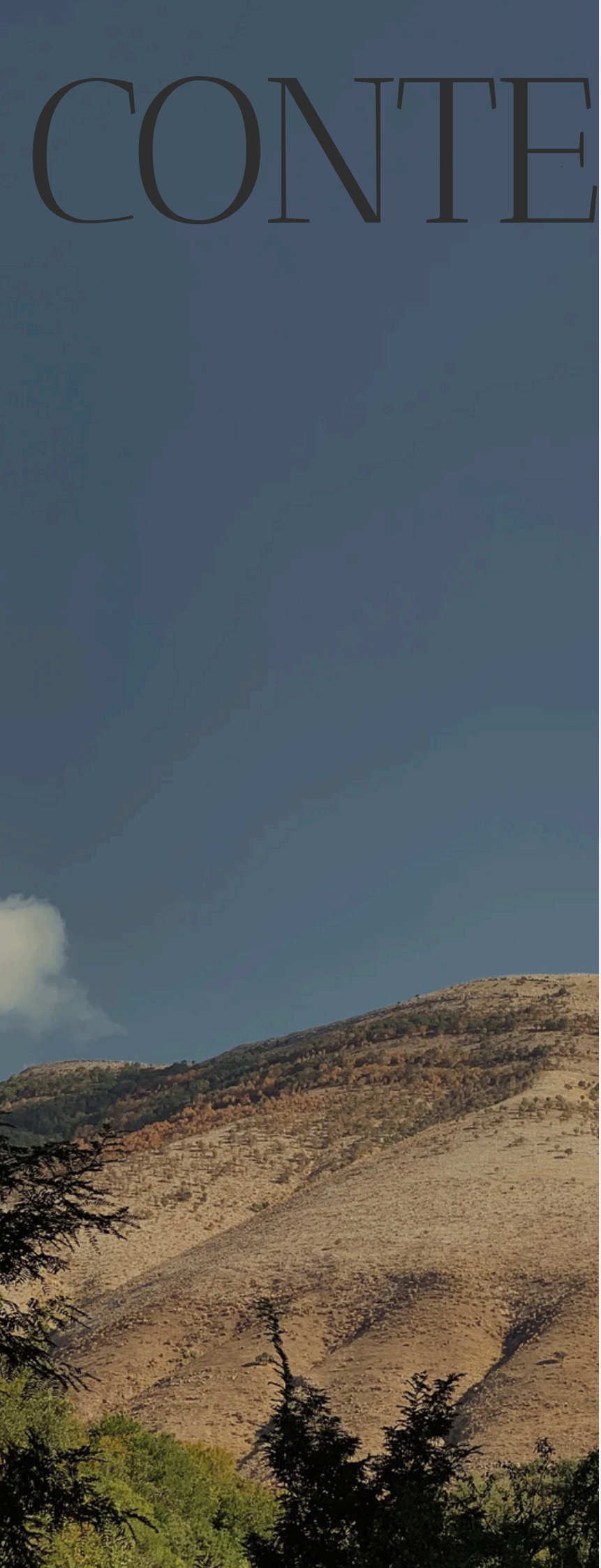

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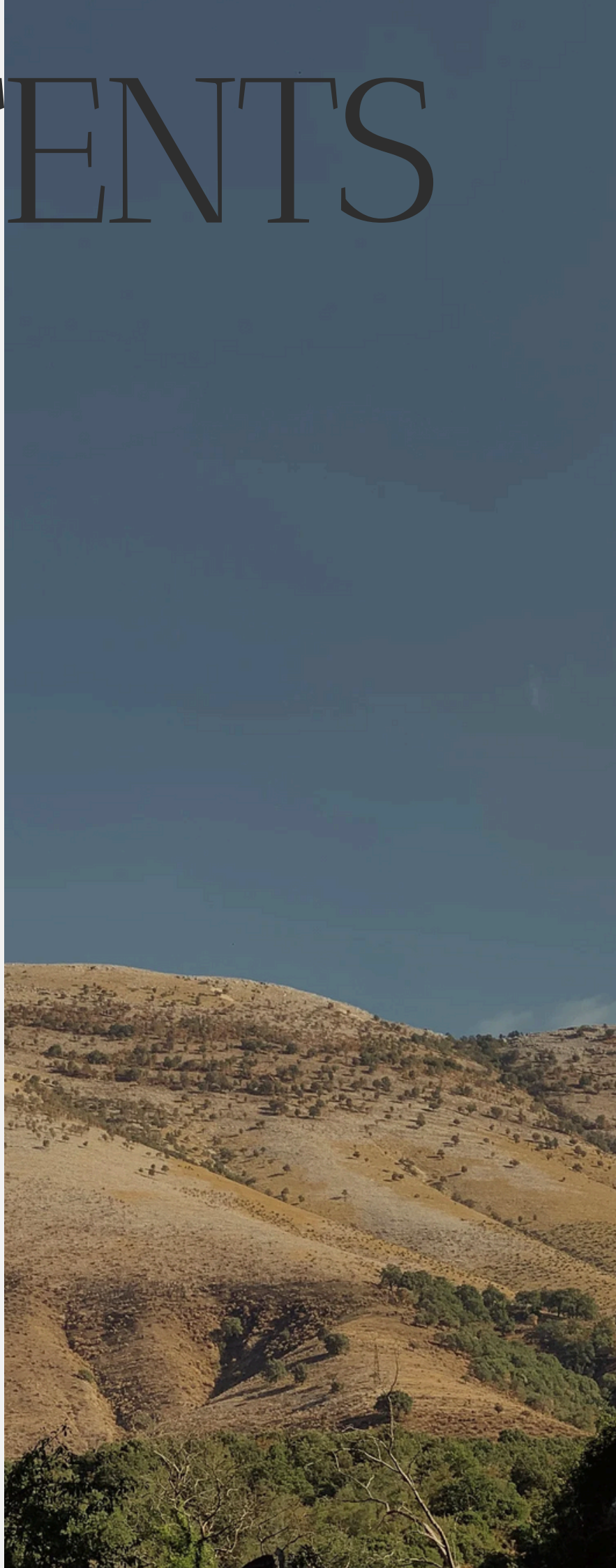
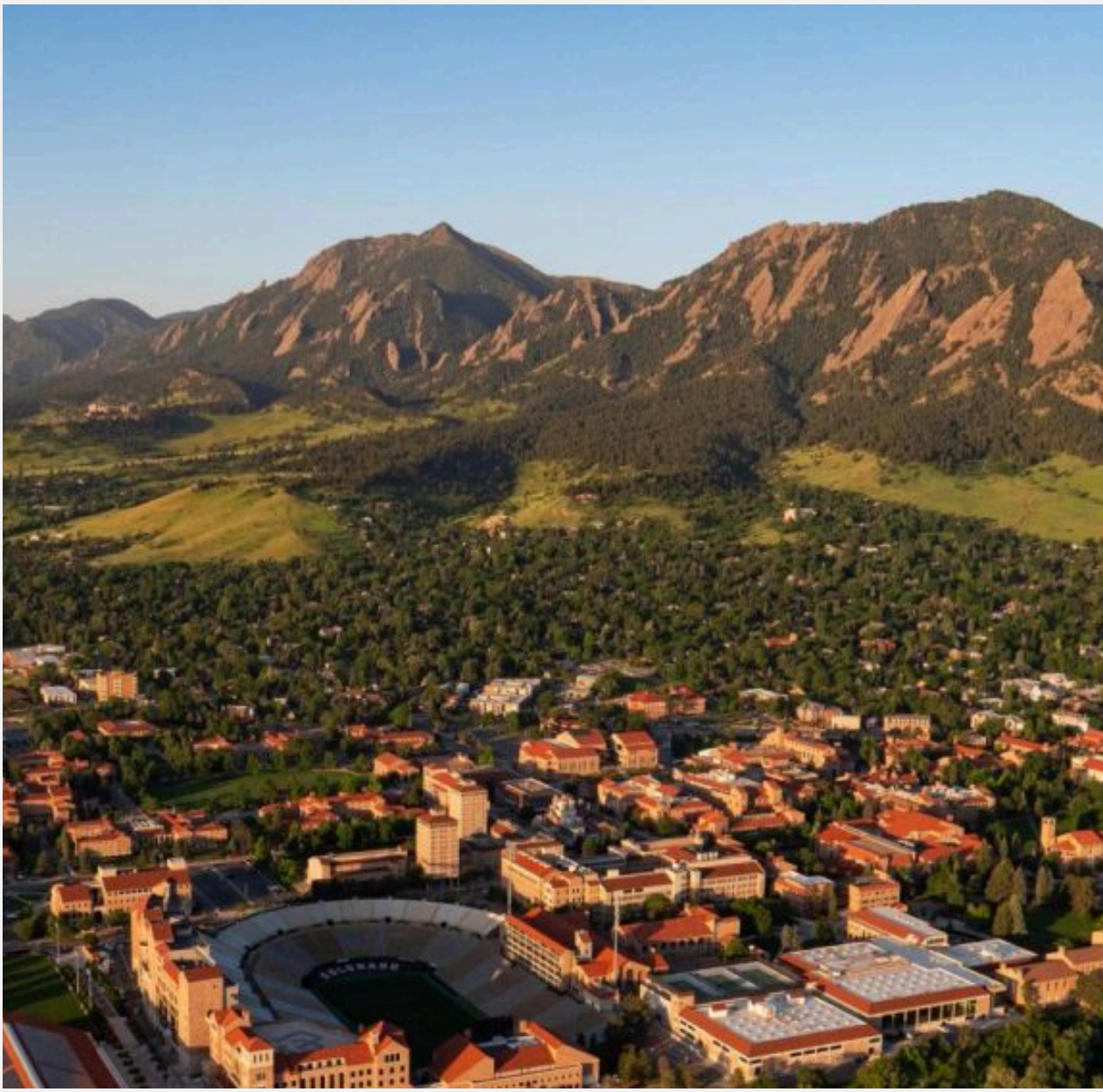


Here's the Deal

The CU Boulder South project has become a significant topic of discussion in Boulder, focusing on urban housing development, environmental preservation, and flood protection. This project illustrates how a university, city planners, and local residents navigate complex land-use challenges while balancing growth and sustainability. This magazine reviews the project's journey, highlighting the diverse perspectives, controversies, and compromises involved. We aim to shed light on the broader implications of development in a community that prioritizes environmental inclusivity.

The Essence



Our goal is to provide research and evidence regarding CU Boulder South, in a manner that is as professional and unbiased as possible. In order to do this, we have strived to collect data and conduct interviews that help us to encapsulate the full picture, thereby producing a report that is transparent and accountable to both ourselves and our readers.

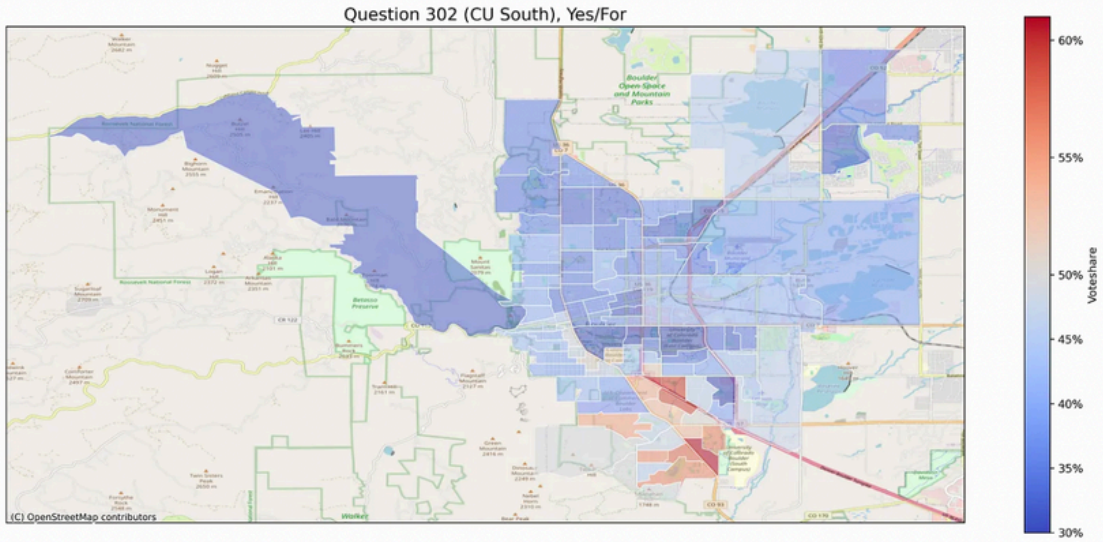
CU Boulder South and Who/What it Affects

Overview

CU South has been a topic of controversy ever since the university acquired it in 1997, something that has not changed in recent years. It effects many within the Boulder community, including nearby residents, students, city planners/policy makers, and Boulder taxpayers and voters. As we explore this topic, we will discuss how each of these groups are involved in multiple different ways, and how the situation seems to be constantly evolving.

The Locals

Neighborhood residents- around the building zone and affected by construction, commuters, students. These stakeholders hold the most vulnerable position- the most to gain and lose- how will development provide benefits for all locals? The flood protection will aid neighborhoods to the north while neighborhoods to the east will see a surge in density and congestion in their already highly populated regions. As stated previously property taxes could potentially increase by a substantial amount, and not everyone home/property owner will be able to fight it. The probable urbanization of the area and its surroundings will not just have cost effects but it will affect the daily lives of many residents in that area. The once quiet neighborhood will become another university hub that will attract many students and people who like the idea of an urbanized Boulder.



Choropleth visualizing precinct-level support for Q302 (CU South annexation).

A choropleth map showing the distribution of voters in the city of Boulder on Ballot measure 302 during the 2021 general election. Measure 302 was about keeping or repealing CU Boulder South's annexation, with the majority of Boulder electing to keep it. Red in this map corresponds to those wanting to repeal 302 and Blue corresponds to those in favor of it.

Dr. Brian C. Keegan, Assistant Professor, CU Boulder (https://bkeegan.medium.com/the-political-geography-of-boulder-44d679a907b3)

CU Boulder South and Who/What it Affects

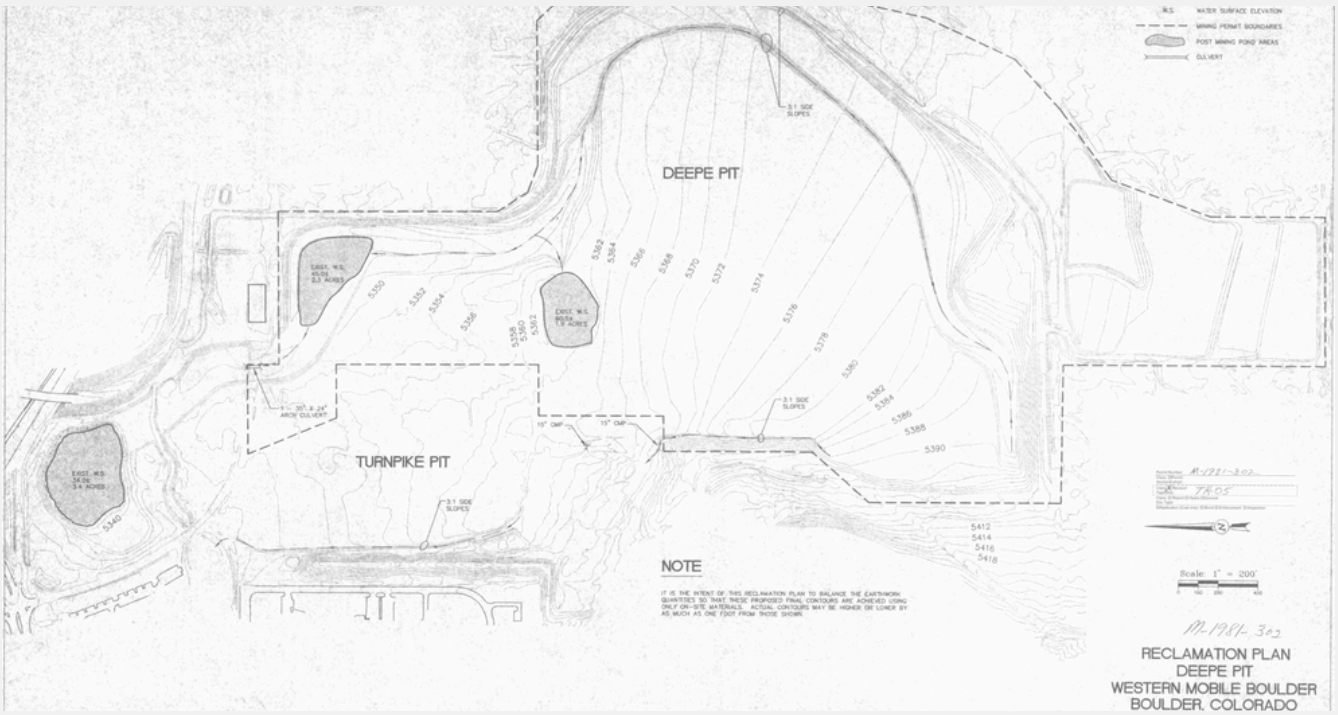
Politics and Politicians

Legislators, University board of regents, Open space trustees, Voters (Pro v. Anti density). The people in positions of power in Boulder will be the deciding factor in how CU South will influence the city and its residents. This issue causes a major divide between policy makers and will affect their campaigns in local elections. By the time development is underway CU South will almost certainly be at the center of debate between pro v anti density politicians. Pro density policy makers will push for the development and their campaigns will reflect that.

Economic Influences

Business owners, tax payers (funding), property/homeowners are some of the groups who will have a major influence on this project. It is resident tax dollars that will aid in the funding of this development and it is the same residents whose taxes may change/be affected by the completion of this project. Once CU South is finished the homes surrounding the area will either gain or lose property value, affecting the property taxes of many residents that have lived there for years. Businesses will likely see a gain in profit from the density influx that is to occur, but will the cost of owning and operating said business increase as well? And will business owners manage to compete with the expected rise in value of their space? Even looking at the cost benefit analysis of this situation it is hard to tell whether the benefits will outweigh the costs and vice versa.

History of CU Boulder South



A reclamation map from 1996, designed with CU's help, that drastically changed what was previously planned. Courtesy of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. (https://boulderreportinglab.org/2022/09/22/decades-of-what-ifs-the-history-of-cu-south-leaves-many-wondering-what-could-have-been/)

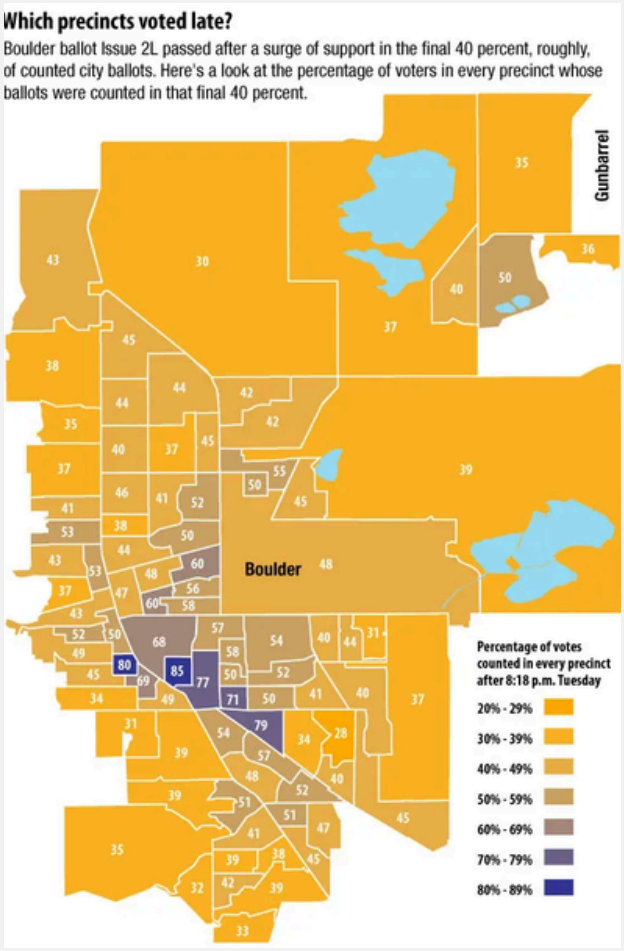
While the development that is destined to become CU Boulder South is relatively new, the plot of land that it is based on has a rich history dating back to the Great Depression. Beginning in the 1920-30s, the 308-acre plot of land was owned and operated as a private pasture farm on the outskirts of the city of Boulder, and it remained that way for nearly 3 more decades. Then, heading into the 60s, the land was sold by the owners to a mining company that intended to use the land as its base of operations for extracting sand and gravel, something that ruffled the feathers of many Boulder residents. Fortunately, the restoration plan for the land gave the community something to look forward to, and was met with praise and admiration from the community and city, and even the Division of Wildlife. When the day finally arrived for the mining company to sell the land, many were ready for the city to gain more recreational space that their city was known for.

However, the city balked at the mining operation's asking price for the land, beginning nearly a decade of negotiations between the two sides that struggled to get off the ground. This allowed for the university to swoop in and acquire the land out from under the city, which threw the decades long plan for restoring the land into disarray. That then kicked off another decades long debate of what the land would (or should) become, a debate that is still ongoing in the city of Boulder today.

Boulder's Voting Patterns and Their Influence

The voting patterns are not decided by contrasting political parties but rather the divide stems from the pro versus anti density trend. This tendency of voting patterns is essential to understand the discourse that surrounds CU Boulder South. The pro-density side of this equation typically votes red, while the anti-density falls under blue. Important factors to consider about each side of this debate are, but not limited to: race, gender, age range, income, housing/property taxes, habitual patterns, voting structure, density of living areas and who lives in those areas.

West of Broadway we see a higher percentage of white populations as well as lower density areas. On the east side of Broadway there is a higher percentage of non white populations in areas that are much more densely populated. The Sunshine Canyon and west Broadway precincts have particularly high white populations while the precincts for the University of Colorado, Boulder Meadows-Holiday, and Boulder Junction have the lowest percentage of white residents in Boulder. But what exactly does this mean or have to do with CU Boulder South? Lets first discuss what these factors look like and how they play into the political divide in Boulder.

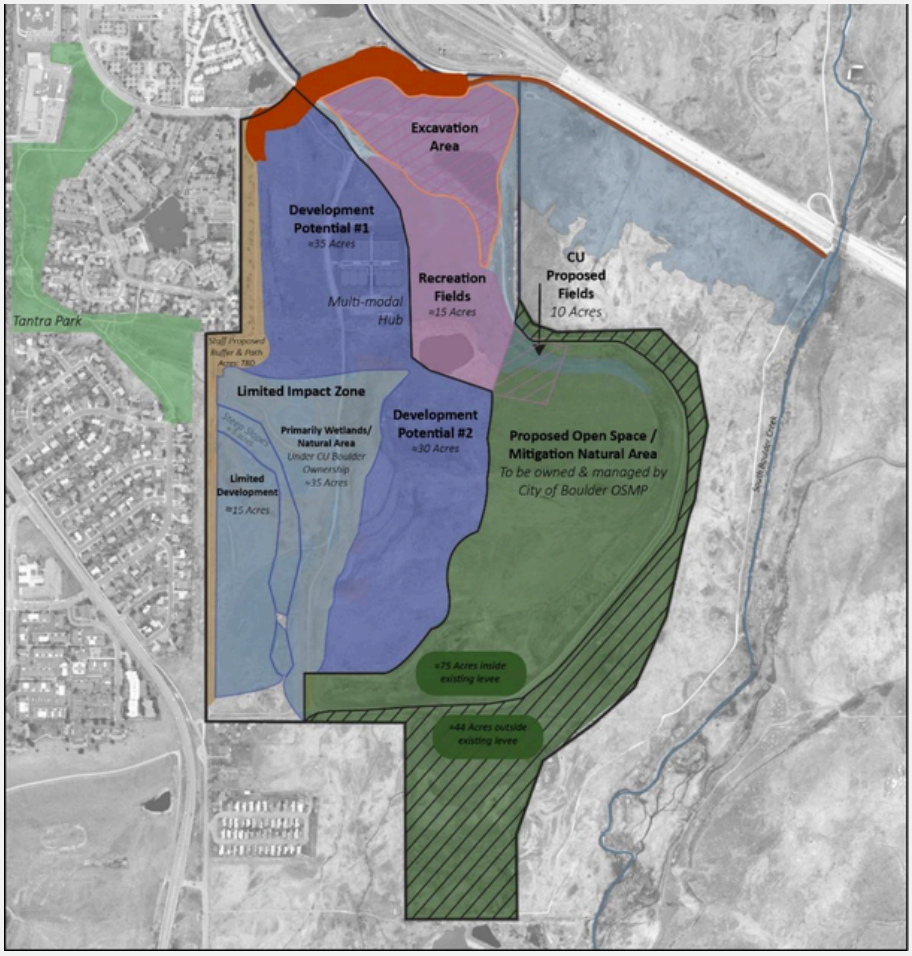


The communities of west Boulder are typically high income individuals or families with noticeably higher property taxes then those living more east. Boulder's politicians, city officials, and prominent community members make up a majority of residents in these areas. The residential properties in these areas are typically owned by the subject who inhabits them– these people are homeowners. Their homes will not be affected by an increase in density nor will their neighborhoods; affordable housing is not a concern for pro-density supporters.

These neighborhoods, additionally, lay directly downstream of the land, owned by CU, at high risk of floods. It would make sense that people living in that area support the flood protection that comes with the development plans of CU South. They will make up a portion of the main beneficiaries of development. Urbanization in Boulder may not directly benefit these communities but it will certainly not negatively affect them either.

Anti-density groups make up the bulk of blue voters in Boulder. These are people primarily living in east Boulder, whose populations are made up of non-white, lower income residents. They will be the groups and communities facing the more negative impacts of expansion and development. The residents of the west, as we know, are homeowners or they own the properties they live in. When looking eastward at the number of property owners whose primary residence are in Boulder the numbers drop. The majority of housing is rented properties such as apartments, condos, duplexes, and rented homes. The populations living in these communities are not homeowners, they face risks of gentrification or raised rent in the instance of Boulder's expansion. Anti-density groups hold the position of opposing expansion because they will be directly affected.

What Will This All Look Like?



https://bouldercolorado.gov/sites/default/files/2021-05/frequentlyaskedquestions4721-1-202104081023.pdf

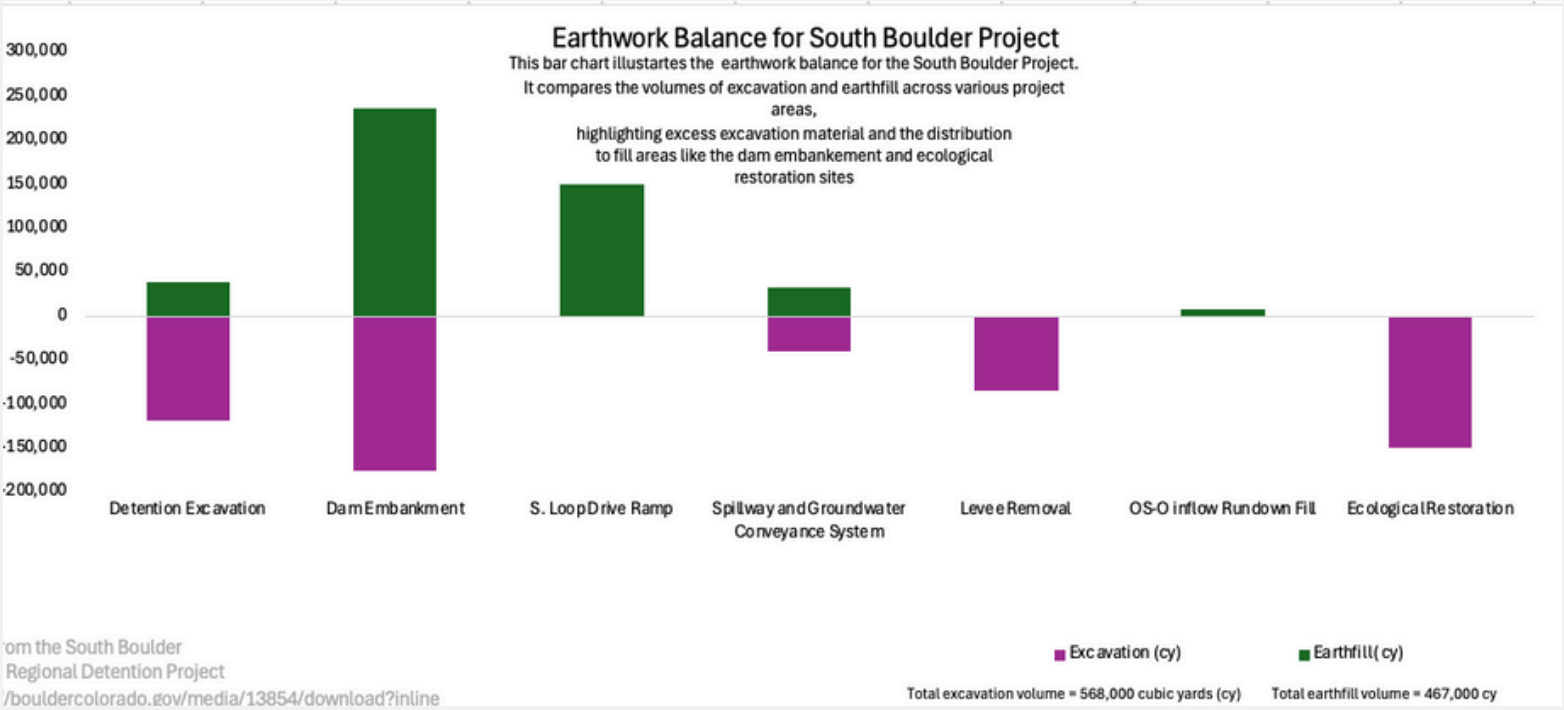
129 acres developed out of **308**

80 acres set aside for flood mitigation and open space

~1,100 affordable residential units

30 acres for recreational fields

Dog park and running track

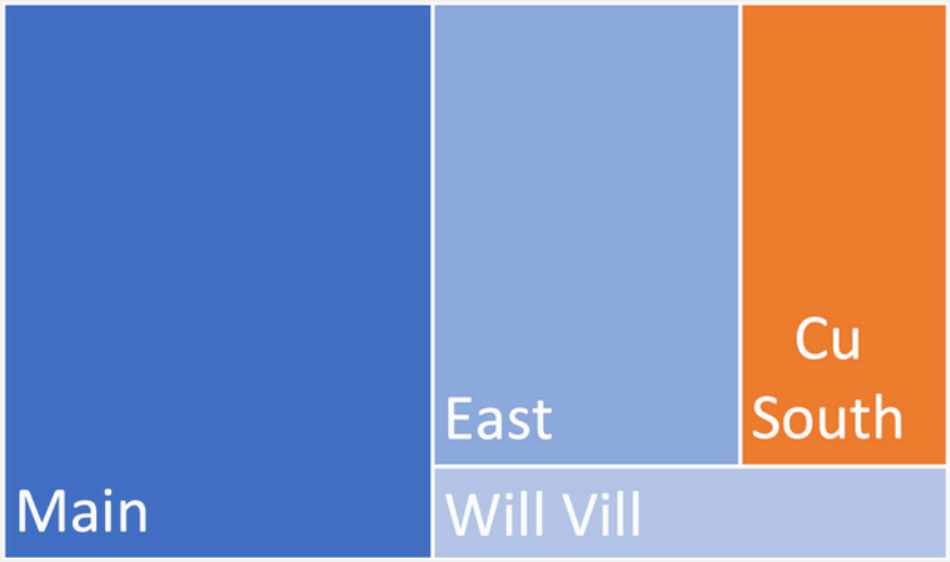


om the South Boulder
Regional Detention Project
/bouldercolorado.gov/media/13854/download?inline

How Will This Campus Compare to Others?

Acreage

Main - 320
East - 191
Williams Village - 64
CU South - 129

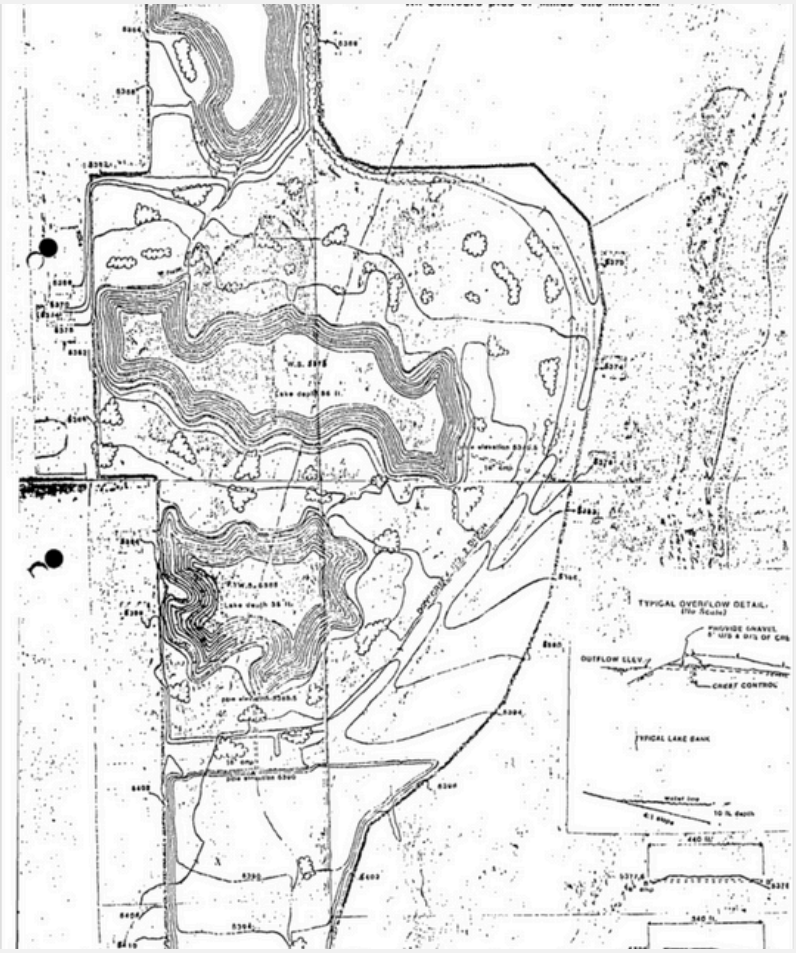


Total Building SqFt

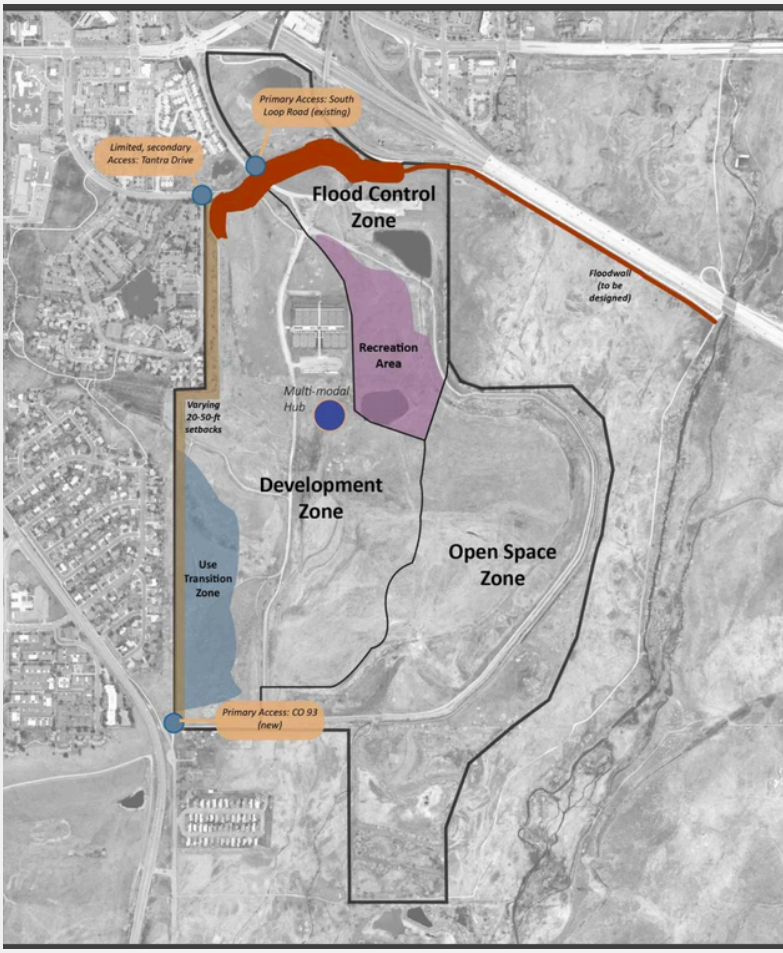
Main - 9.25 million sq ft
East - 2.37 million sq ft
Williams Village - 1.24 million sq ft
CU South - **max** of 2.25 million sq ft

Changes to Expect

Open Space



(Original Reclamation Map, 1981, https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22416339-original-reclamation-map/?responsive=1&title=1)



(University's Reclamation Plan, 2022, https://www.colorado.edu/cubouldersouth/)

One of Boulder's main calling cards is its close proximity to the Front Range, mainly the Flatirons that have become synonymous with the city. Boulder has the most protected open space in the Denver Metro area, and there's not a close second. Keeping with that theme, the original reclamation plan following the mining operation taking place on the land was to turn it into a open space, wildlife refuge for everyone to enjoy, one which was applauded by many, including the Division of Wildlife. But when the city balked at the asking price of Flatiron's Sand and Gravel Co., the university was able to swoop in and acquire the land, much to the chagrin of residents and city officials alike.

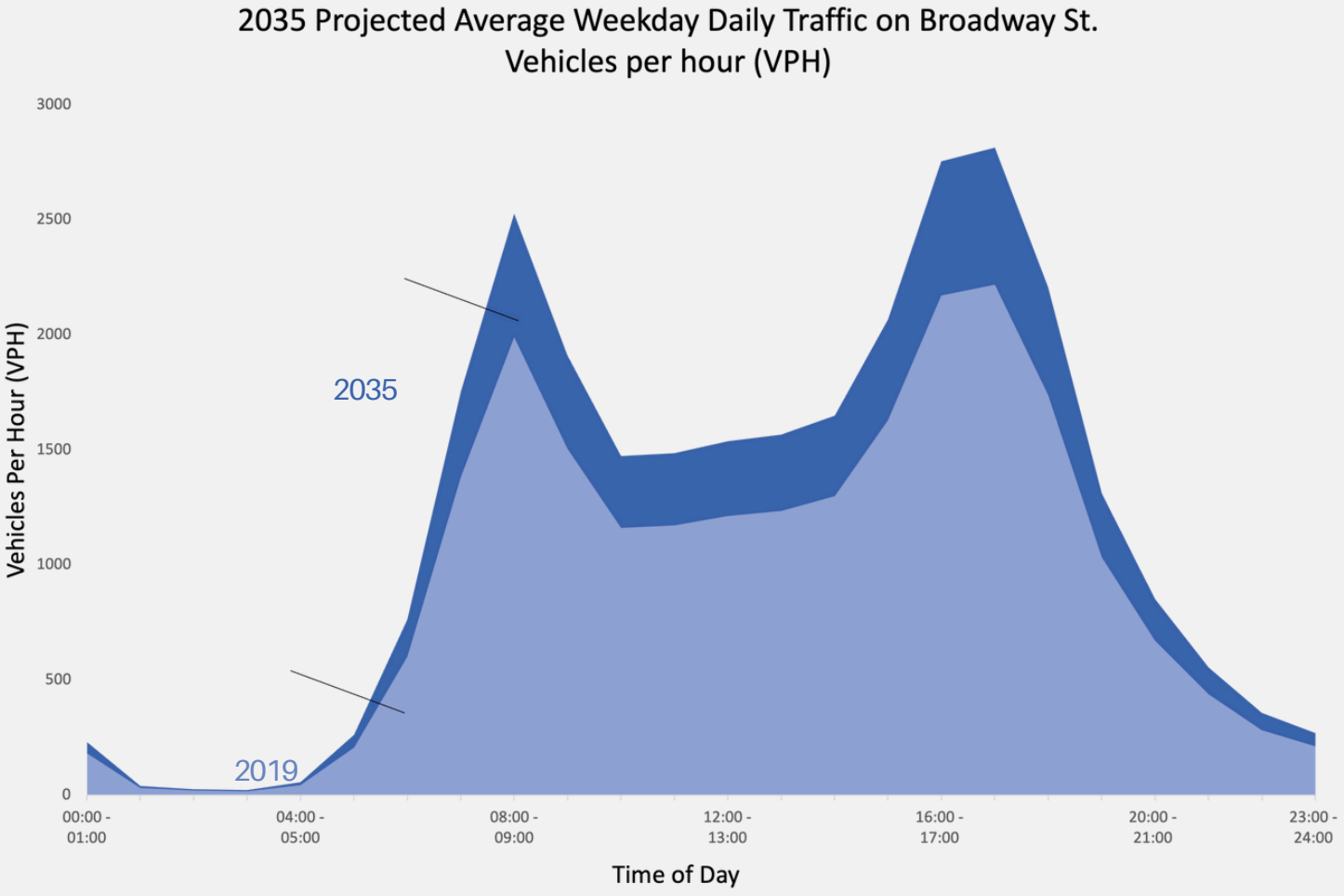
Following the university's 1996 acquisition of the land, the reclamation project drastically changed. The four lakes planned for the area eventually became two ponds a fraction of the size. A berm designed to (theoretically) protect the South Boulder floodplain was gone, and in its place was a housing development plan, although the City of Boulder and the university have tentative plans tp construct a flood mitigation site in the berm's place.

Changes to Expect

Traffic

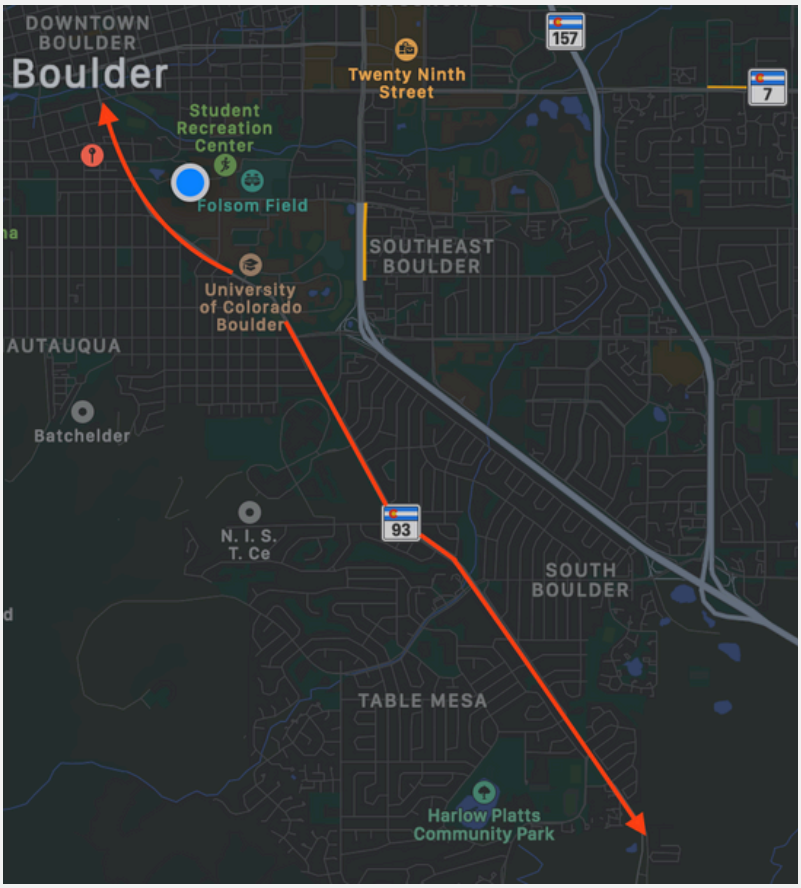
The development of CU South brings lots of transportation and mobility discussion with it. In a city that is already reaching its capacity, the increased traffic the new campus site will generate is a very important variable in understanding the development's impact on the community. The Fox Tuttle Transportation Group is a local, Colorado transportation consulting firm that provide operational, safety, and design services. In 2021, Fox Tuttle prepared a traffic impact study for the CU South campus development. The city of Boulder and CU staff have been encouraged to use the published information to recognize intersection and roadway areas in need of improvement.

The goal of the study was to quantify the predicted traffic generated by the campus and identify potential traffic impacts. Looking specifically at Broadway St, which is one of the main roads used to commute to and from CU South, the traffic impact study analyzed average daily traffic patterns for both North and South bound by recording how many vehicles pass per hour in each direction. Using this data, Fox Tuttle ran a linear regression analysis for projected traffic volume growth into 2035. The initial data was from 2019, and the 16 year projection found a 1.5% growth rate.



Changes to Expect

Mobility



When looking at the graph, it is important to understand traffic volume growth is a natural occurrence as cities and their surrounding grow and development. This graph is only showing the predicted growth patterns as a result of CU South, it does not account for general traffic uptake which is probably much more. A 1.5% growth rate might not seem like much, but if the transportation infrastructure does not grow with it, transportation and mobility issues will increase. In 2021, CU Boulder published a campus master plan, which reviews general university evolution and is intended to be used as a source of ongoing decision making as the school develops.

In the key analysis findings, there is a mobility section that looks at pedestrian environments , transit services, and parking availability in and around campus. Under the transit subsection, the report highlights the amount of intra-campus student traffic and the importance of and reliable transit options. With only talking about East Campus and Williams Village traffic activity, the report mentions that as demand and activity increases, the current transit conditions "will only worsen if transit options cannot keep up with the transportation demands as additional facilities are developed". By recognizing where improvements are needed, and seeing the projected volume increase, it is very important to understand CU Souths role in transit and mobility throughout Boulder.

How Will CU Respond?

Trip Caps

Per the annexation agreement, CU agreed to a "trip cap" on number of vehicles driving in and out of the new site. Analysis from the traffic impact study submitted by the university limits daily trips to 5,550 for South Loop Drive and 750 for State Highway 93.

Transportation Fees

CU will pay a transportation fee per each housing unit and square footage of non-residential facilities. These feels would be spent on transportation projects that benefit CU Souths property, as well as projects throughout the city. Based on projected housing units and square footage, its estimated at full build-out, the fee would provide roughly **$3 million.**

Site Access Improvements

Neighbors and local residents of the annexed property are concerned about mobility issues with the new development. Access improvements will include

1. A 12-foot wide multi use path along the western boundary
2. South loop drive will be contrusted as a "complete street" with a detached multi-use path and a buffered bike lane
3. Reconstruction of existing Table Mesa Drive / South Loop Drive / US-36 off ramp intersection
4. A new access off of State Highway 93

Insights from a Project Insider

Interview with Brandon Coleman - Engineering Project Manager

We had the privilege of getting the opportunity to meet with one of CU Boulder South's engineering project manager. This exclusive interview provided valuable insights concerning the project's flood mitigation plans as he leads the South Boulder Creek Flood Mitigation team. His insights provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the project's objectives, challenges, and long-term vision.

Public Works in the CU Boulder South Project

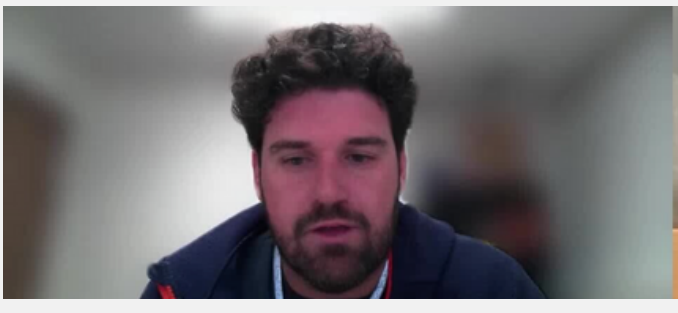
Public Works is an important part of achieving success for the CU Boulder South project. Coleman explained that their responsibilities include monitoring environmental compliance and establishing permits related to flood and environmental mitigation. They also oversee regulatory compliance for CU's future development in the designated development zone, ensuring a balance between progress and regulations.

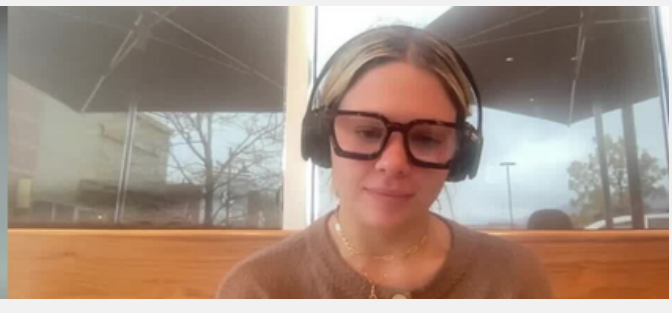
Coleman had explained his team, "we'll be responsible for the city owned property that we're using for flood mitigation and also environmental mitigation... environmental compliance and close out of our environmental permits related to the project... through the annexation agreement will be a reviewer for future CU development in the development zone. But CU will be responsible for any future development as it relates to the development zone."

Construction and Completion Timeline

Construction on the flood mitigation and environmental components is slated to begin in 2025, with a two-year timeline for completion. Coleman had highlighted that the phase will address immediate flood and ecological concerns, after which CU will focus on its broader master plan for the development zone.

"So we're hoping to start construction next year in 2025 will have probably about two years worth of construction and that'll only be for the flood mitigation components and the environmental mitigation components. And then once that's complete, I think CU will work on their master plan," Coleman explained.





Understanding the Flood Risk

Flood mitigation is a driving force behind the CU Boulder South development, as the area's unique geographic and infrastructural challenges have made it highly susceptible to rapid and unpredictable flooding. These floods pose significant risks, endangering lives, damaging property, and disrupting the community's infrastructure.

Brandon Coleman, Engineering Project Manager, elaborated on the specific challenges and solutions: "The floodwaters essentially parallel US 36 and then overtop at Table Mesa Park and Ride. So the plan right now is to capture those floodwaters, essentially hold on to them, and release them downstream safely."

To achieve this, Coleman described a key feature of the design: "This piping, and it's a tunnel, goes under US 36 and allows us to control the release of the water so that we don't impact people outside of the floodplain, and we're able to detain that water." This innovative system is central to ensuring both safety and efficiency, providing a controlled solution to mitigate future flood risks.

The Flood Mitigation Strategy

The CU Boulder South flood mitigation strategy masterfully combines innovative engineering with ecological restoration, addressing the area's significant flood risks while enhancing the surrounding environment. At its core is an earthen dam embankment, meticulously designed to hold back floodwaters and withstand major events without being overtopped. For extreme scenarios exceeding the 100-year flood threshold, the embankment transitions into a concrete spillway, ensuring overflow is managed safely and effectively.

Brandon Coleman, Engineering Project Manager, elaborates on the strategy: "This dam embankment would be an earthen embankment that's designed to not be overtopped, and then that transitions into a concrete flood wall or spillway that is designed to be overtopped in any events greater than 100 years."

He also highlights the project's ecological focus: "Natural processes... can serve that dual purpose of life safety and ecological restoration. This ecological restoration area is a really big part of the project because it not only helps with the hydraulics but also reconnects a historic floodplain that was cut off previously." By blending cutting-edge engineering with nature's own systems, the project not only safeguards against future floods but also revitalizes the environment, creating a lasting impact for both people and wildlife.

A Safer, More Sustainable Future

The CU Boulder South project embodies a dual mission: protecting lives and restoring the environment. By addressing the area's flood risks through innovative engineering and ecological restoration, the project aims to safeguard the community while revitalizing its natural landscape

Brandon Coleman, Engineering Project Manager, emphasizes that. "life safety is our number one priority".

Ultimately, the CU Boulder South project reflects a visionary approach to flood mitigation. It ensures the safety of the community while honoring the environment, proving that life safety and ecological stewardship can work hand in hand for a resilient future..

How CU South Will Help The Housing Crisis

The annexed land will predominantly be used for housing faculty, staff, non-first-year, and graduate students, with a required minimum 2-to-1 square footage ratio of housing to non-housing buildings. The development plans anticipate 1,100 housing units, including 550 apartment or condo units for faculty, staff, and graduate students, and 550 two-bedroom apartments for non-first-year students. To ensure compatibility with neighboring properties, a "use transition zone" will be established along the property's edge nearest to existing neighborhoods, featuring residential development such as townhomes or single-family homes designed to blend contextually with the surrounding area.

Additionally, five acres will be designated for approximately 110 affordable housing units available to the broader community, not limited to university affiliates. In response to Boulder's urgent housing crisis, the project prioritizes the construction of 150 housing units, which will be completed before any other development begins.

Do You Have What It Takes To Build CU Boulder South...?

Understand the complexities of decision-making by putting yourself in the shoes of city planners, university officials, and community members

What does *your* CU Boulder South look like?

What are you gonna prioritize....

Flood Protection

Prioritize flood protection, safeguarding homes from future flooding

Housing Development

Prioritize housing, addressing the urgent need for addorable residences

To preserve or not preserve...

Open Space Preservation

Preserve 80% as open space, leaving limited room for university expansion

University Expansion Development

Develop 50% for university facilities while preserving the rest as green space

Your plan triggers strong backlash from environmental advocates and local residents who feel the university has overstepped its bounds

Managing your budget...

Sustainable Building Practices

Go with the sustainable option, risking budget overruns and potential delays

Budget Constraints

Choose cost-effective traditional materials, sacrificing sustainability

reduces the project's carbon footprint, minimizes waste, and enhances local biodiversity. Housing is thoughtfully incorporated into the project, prioritizing eco-friendly designs such as energy-efficient buildings, green roofs, and communal spaces to reduce environmental impact.

How to manage community backlash...

Convene town halls and stakeholder meetings to gather input and pledge future green initaitves

Launch a PR campaign to emphasize the projects other benefits (flood protection, affordability)

Who will housing development target .

Prioritize low-income families

Reserve units exclusively for low-income families

By exclusively dedicating housing units to low-income families, the university loses the support of key stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, and graduate students

Prioritize university housing

Split units between low-income families and university members

How will transportation work...

Provide more transportation

Invest in expanded public transit options

Encourage non-car travel

Add more bike lanes and pedestrian paths to encourage non-car travel

Few people end up using them due to Boulder's weather, long commuting distances, or a lack of interest

How to fund the transit expansion...

Increase student and staff transportation fees to partially fund the expansion

Partner with the city of Boulder or regional transit authorites to share costs and secure grants

The CU Boulder South project achieves a delicate balance between flood protection, environmental preservation, and sustainable development, resulting in a landmark initiative that benefits the community, the university, and the environment. By prioritizing flood protection, preserving open space, and adopting sustainable building practices, the project sets a new standard for urban development in environmentally conscious regions.

The project is ultimately completed and achieves moderate success, addressing immediate flood risks and preserving Boulder's natural beauty. However, the compromises made—particularly in sustainability and university expansion—lead to ongoing challenges in housing, environmental advocacy, and community relations. While the project does not fully realize its potential as a transformative initiative, it stands as an example of balancing competing priorities, albeit imperfectly.

Both approaches achieve critical goals—flood protection and housing—but each falls short in delivering a comprehensive solution. Prioritizing housing development offers a more inclusive housing solution and transit improvements but sacrifices some environmental goals and financial harmony. While maximizing flood protection delivers robust flood keeping and open space preservation but misses opportunities to address housing needs and sustainability.

The CU Boulder South project achieves significant success in addressing Boulder's housing crisis and improving accessibility through expanded public transit. These accomplishments satisfy many community members, particularly those directly benefiting from the housing and transit options. However, the lack of environmental focus leaves a notable gap, sparking criticism from environmentalists who see the project as a missed opportunity for sustainability leadership. The project is ultimately seen as a practical, housing-centered solution that prioritizes immediate community needs but fails to fully align with Boulder's environmental ideals.

Current State of CU Boulder South

As 2024 comes to a close, the CU Boulder South project appears to be entering the first stages of development. According to city and university officials, the flood mitigation project is set to begin by early 2025, with an estimated completion by early 2026. Meanwhile, the rest of the site, mainly the student/faculty housing and recreational sites, will be in the design phase as early as 2025. Actual construction and development of the property can begin no sooner than 2027, per the agreement between the city and university.

There is still plenty of opposition to the CU Boulder South project from nearby Boulder residents, but any plans to overturn the annexation agreement, or at least delay it, have failed. In an interview with Dr. Brian Keegan, assistant professor at CU Boulder who analyzed the voting patterns regarding CU South and published a study about his results, he stated, “After two ballot measures, there’s been lots of voter, Regent, and University engagement. Lots of opportunities for Democratic feedback, that all point in the same direction, and they’ve all come to this decision [to uphold the annexation].” Given that the annexation was upheld as recently as 2021, the CU Boulder South project appears to be inevitable for Boulder and its residents.

Special Thanks To:

Brandon Coleman, Engineering Project Manager, City of Boulder

Dr. Brian C. Keegan, Assistant Professor, University of Colorado Boulder

Professor Nathan D. Pieplow, Associate Teaching Professor, University of Colorado Boulder

Link to White Paper/Work Cited:

White Paper