

FOREGROUND / **NOW**



## POSTINDUSTRIAL PASTORAL

**ORGANIZED NEIGHBORS HELP A NEGLECTED BROWNFIELD IN THE CITY OF DENVER STAY RURAL.**

BY ZACH MORTICE

When the Globe Smelting and Refining Company set up shop north of Denver in the late 1880s, neighbors worked side by side in its foundries. One hundred years later, the company was the subject of increasing criticism and action from those same neighbors because of environmental pollution. By the time the plants closed, the neighborhood of Globeville was left with a Superfund site, the soil filled with arsenic and lead. But the communal solidarity remained, though this time it would be harnessed to rehabilitate the five-and-a-half-acre brownfield site into a community green space.

“They worked together, they knew how to do that, and so they kept that vision going,” says Cindy Chang, the executive director of Groundwork Denver, an environmental justice nonprofit that helped guide the Globeville neighbors’ vision for the site. After more than a decade of planning, the outcome of that community organizing is the Platte Farm Open Space, a passive recreational landscape completed in 2020 that was meant for contemplative strolls in a rehabilitated native prairie.

**TOP**  
Globeville’s landscape before it was reimagined as a community green space.

**BOTTOM**  
Valerian’s design maintains the rural atmosphere of the neighborhood, channeling it into a richly planted native prairie.



VALERIAN, TOP; SCOTT DRESSSEL-MARTIN, BOTTOM

FOREGROUND / **NOW**



**PLATTE FARM  
OPEN SPACE**

- 1 NORTH POLLINATOR GARDEN & ENTRY
- 2 EXISTING FEATURE COTTONWOOD
- 3 CONCRETE TRAIL
- 4 DETENTION POND FOREBAY
- 5 DETENTION POND
- 6 DETENTION OVERLOOK
- 7 CRUSHER FINES TRAIL
- 8 BOULDER RETAINING WALL
- 9 POST AND DOWEL FENCE
- 10 SOUTH POLLINATOR GARDEN & ENTRY

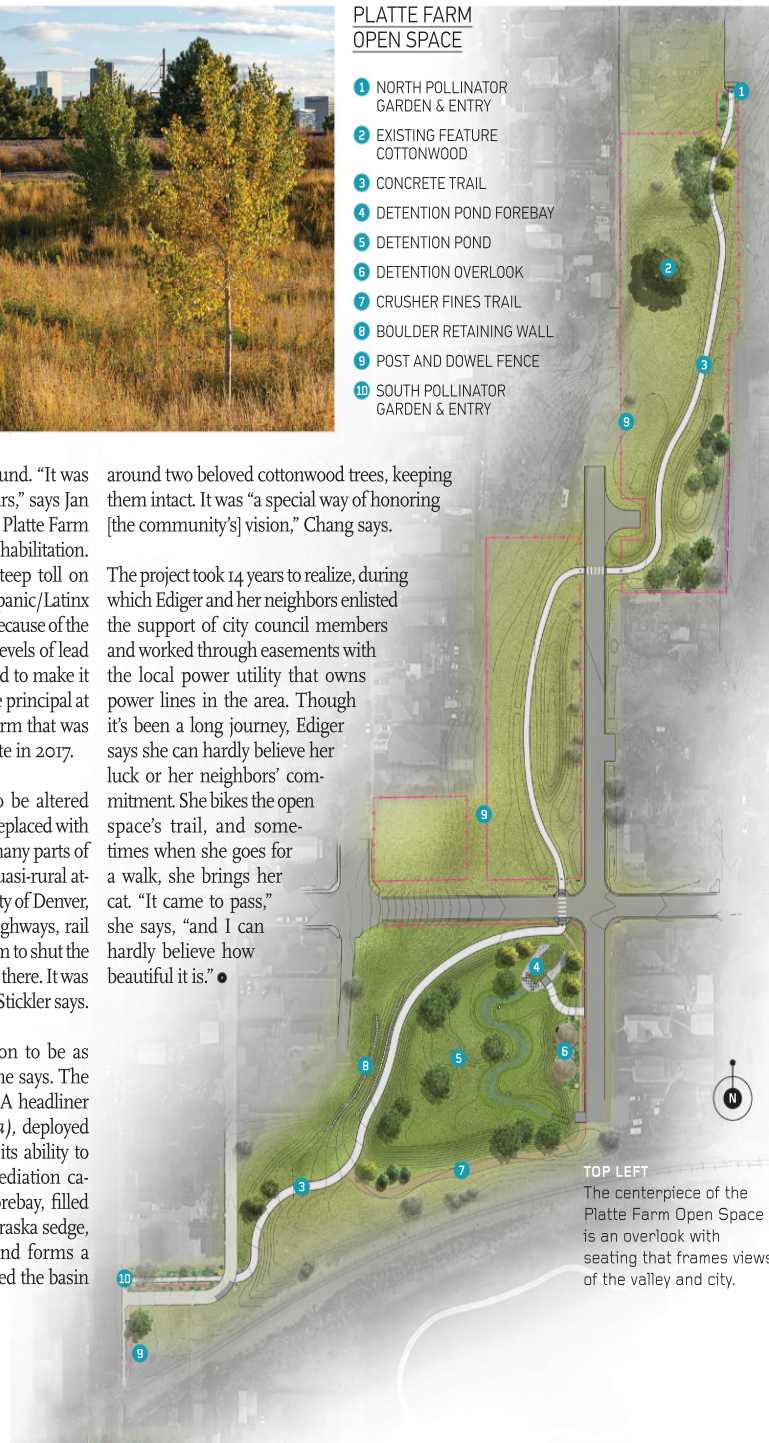
For years, the site was a dumping ground. “It was a very popular area to joyride stolen cars,” says Jan Ediger, a neighbor and member of the Platte Farm steering committee, which led the rehabilitation. Environmental degradation took a steep toll on Globeville, now a predominantly Hispanic/Latinx neighborhood, as the EPA found that, because of the pollution, local children had elevated levels of lead in their bodies. “Everybody just wanted to make it right,” says Stacey Stickler, an associate principal at Valerian, the landscape architecture firm that was hired to create a master plan for the site in 2017.

Certain elements on the site had to be altered (contaminated soil was removed and replaced with a topsoil cap), but neighbors wanted many parts of the landscape to remain, such as its quasi-rural atmosphere. Though it’s located in the city of Denver, the site is isolated due to interstate highways, rail lines, and industrial properties that seem to shut the rest of the city away. “There’s still a barn there. It was very important to keep that rural feel,” Stickler says.

Ediger wanted Valerian’s intervention to be as “simple and as natural as possible,” she says. The planting plan relies heavily on forbs. A headliner is Indian blanket (*Gaillardia pulchella*), deployed across the entire site and chosen for its ability to attract pollinators and its phytoremediation capabilities. A permeable Grasscrete forebay, filled with water-loving grasses such as Nebraska sedge, channels stormwater into a basin and forms a picturesque overlook. Valerian designed the basin

around two beloved cottonwood trees, keeping them intact. It was “a special way of honoring [the community’s] vision,” Chang says.

The project took 14 years to realize, during which Ediger and her neighbors enlisted the support of city council members and worked through easements with the local power utility that owns power lines in the area. Though it’s been a long journey, Ediger says she can hardly believe her luck or her neighbors’ commitment. She bikes the open space’s trail, and sometimes when she goes for a walk, she brings her cat. “It came to pass,” she says, “and I can hardly believe how beautiful it is.” ●



**TOP LEFT**  
The centerpiece of the Platte Farm Open Space is an overlook with seating that frames views of the valley and city.

SCOTT DRESSEL-MARTIN, TOP LEFT; VALERIAN, RIGHT