

COUNCIL STUDY SESSION NOTES
CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO
City Council Chambers 7500 W. 29th Avenue
May 4, 2020

Mayor Bud Starker called the Study Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

This meeting was conducted as a VIRTUAL MEETING.

No members of the Council or City staff were physically present at the Municipal building for this meeting; the public did not attend in person.

Mayor Starker welcomed the Council, other elected officials, staff and interested citizens.

The Mayor also explained the virtual meeting format, how citizens will have the opportunity to be heard, and the procedures and policies to be followed.

Council members present: Janeece Hoppe, Judy Hutchinson, Zach Urban, Rachel Hultin, Korey Stites, Valerie Nosler Beck, and Leah Dozeman. Councilmember Weaver excused herself do to pressing personal matters.

Also present: City Clerk, Steve Kirkpatrick; City Manager Patrick Goff; Director of Administration Allison Scheck; Director of Parks and Recreation, Karen O'Donnell, guests including Ms. Lilly Griego and Mr. Christian Lebron with the US Census, Mark Johnson, MD, Executive Director of Jefferson County Public Health; other staff and interested citizens.

Citizen Comment on Agenda Items

There were no citizens who wished to speak to Council at this time.

Note about Wheat Ridge Speaks:

Citizens may visit the Wheat Ridge Speaks website and enter written comments of up to 1,000 words on any agenda item. The deadline for citizens to submit comments is 12:00 Noon Mountain Time on the day of a Council session so that Council members, other elected officials and City Staff have time to review the comments before the meeting on Monday evening. The City Clerk's Office transcribes those Wheat Ridge Speaks comments into these minutes, placing each comment along with the record for that agenda item (verbatim, if the comments do not contain lascivious language or unlawful hate speech).

For this Council session no one entered any comments on Wheat Ridge Speaks about any of the agenda items.

- 1.** 2020 Census Update
(discussion began at 6:32 PM, 2 minutes into the session)

Ms. Scheck introduced our guests to discuss the impact of CoVid-19. Ms. Scheck reported that as of today 69.2% of Wheat Ridge residents have completed their Census responses.

Mr. Lebron discussed operational adjustments for the Census in response to the pandemic. He reported that the deadline for responding to the Census in Phase I, self-response online or via mail, is extended from July 31 to October 31, 2020. Mobile questionnaire assistance, or visits by Census takers, will still begin July 31, 2020 but no end date has been announced. He also reviewed details on how people living in group quarters, people who can be contacted through service-based agencies and people experiencing homelessness can respond to the Census. He then discussed how other special populations, e.g. those living in motels or campgrounds, will be contacted and counted. Ms. Griego reported on the changes in deadlines for reporting Census counts in 2021, which still require Congressional approval. Our guests also reported the self-response rates by Census tract for Jefferson County and the City of Wheat Ridge.

Council questions and comments:

Councilmembers asked how the City can help increase the self-response rate. Ms. Griegos said we need to think outside of the box in terms of when and where we have a chance to educate people. As an example, she told the story of a drive-in movie where we could reach a large group, who are safely distanced. Use any and all media and social media.

Ms. Scheck reported on the activities of the City task force, the Complete Count Committee, which is working on public education and participation.

2. COVID-19 Response Update – Jefferson County Public Health (this discussion began about 6:48 pm, or 18 minutes into the recording).

Mr. Goff introduced Mark Johnson, MD, Executive Director of Jefferson County Public Health. Dr. Johnson reviewed the County statistics. He stated that the reported case count is only about one fifth of the actual number of people who have been infected.

Right now, the County is focusing on the indicators put into place by the State, County and Federal governments. Testing and contact tracing as always are key. Watching for flattening of the curve and at least 14 days with decreasing cases are the other two of the four key indicators. The Governor has said the Counties should look at their data, and the data for neighboring counties, before transitioning from Stay at Home to Safer at Home. All Counties in the Denver metro except Douglas have continued with the Stay at Home order because the indicators make it clear that staying at home is still necessary. On Friday May 8, these metro counties are scheduled to transition to Safer at Home, after which the public health officials will closely monitor the indicators for signs of improvement or regression.

He also discussed the implications, public health and economic, of requiring face coverings or masks. Data from prior pandemics indicates that any mask less than an

N95 provides little protection. Law enforcement has too few resources to enforce any mask order. Therefore, the County is unlikely to implement an order requiring masks. He also reported that currently nearly 100% of workers in businesses are wearing masks, and the public is wearing face covering at the rate of about 75 – 90%, with an average of around 85%. Therefore, it is unlikely that a mandatory order would increase the number of people wearing masks when visiting stores and other businesses.

Council questions and comments:

Council asked what the Safer at Home phase will look like for local businesses. Dr. Johnson described how the Governor's orders change when we transition to the second of three phases, from phase one, Stay at Home to phase two, Safer at Home. The key requirements that will remain are social distancing and limiting the numbers of people who congregate in one place. It will not be until phase three that restaurants, gyms and other businesses where people gather will re-open.

Council asked what the County thinks about resuming scholastic athletics. Dr. Johnson said that for now all Jefferson County school facilities are closed to individual or group practice or competition. Perhaps in phase three these activities will slowly resume.

Council also asked about holding religious services. Currently only 10 people may meet in person indoors or in proximity outdoors. People may gather in the cars to participate from their vehicles in religious services, if they all maintain social distancing, like drive-in movie theaters.

Dr. Johnson also explained that businesses may bring up to 50% of their employees back to their offices and other workplaces. Some retailers, especially large box stores and supermarkets, are limiting the numbers of people allowed in the store at any one time.

Council asked what the key messages and methods are for the County's public health education efforts, and how the City can support that campaign. Dr. Johnson reported the County is using any and all media, social media, signage and educational handouts.

Council asked whether it is necessary to wear masks when out of doors and at a distance from anyone else. Dr. Johnson indicated that when outdoors people do not need to wear a mask as long as they are at least 6 feet from anyone else, or 25 feet away from other riders when riding a bicycle.

Dr. Johnson also reported, in reply to a Councilmember's question, that we do not know what schoolrooms will look like when schools re-open. He said that people under age 20 typically have minor symptoms from CoVid-19. However, when kids congregate then they may be contagious and infect adults and seniors, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers and others in their extended families. He also says that the CDC says no masks on children under age 2. For older children, the deciding factor is the risk to the child and more important the risk that a child will transmit the infection to an adult, especially a senior.

Dr. Johnson strongly supports mask wearing for children when they gather in places like daycare centers and youth activities. However, he does not foresee an order that children wear masks.

Council also asked whether there is a fallback plan if the new Safer at Home phase triggers a surge in infections. Dr. Johnson responded that public health officials will monitor daily and closely indicators that the spread in the community is increasing again. He emphasized that we are opening slowly and cautiously because reverting to Stay at Home would be very difficult in terms of public compliance.

He also discussed herd immunity, which is based on the concept that if enough people are immune from having had the virus or had an approved vaccine then transmission is much less likely. Right now there are many, many unanswered questions about how to achieve herd immunity.

Dr. Johnson emphasized that if individual citizens comply with the public health orders, maintain social distance, and wear masks, then we will continue to see progress. It all depends on us the people.

Council asked Dr. Johnson about the wisdom and risks of beginning to do elective surgeries in hospitals again. He replied that when there is adequate testing available and sufficient personal protective equipment in stock, then beginning to do some elective surgeries makes sense – with close and stringent monitoring.

When asked about a timeline for achieving herd immunity, Dr. Johnson replied that we expect to move from phase to phase in the re-opening the community about every 5 weeks. Full herd immunity will require at least many months, and potentially for one to two years.

3. Update on Parks and Recreation Programming/Schedules
(Discussion began at about 7:40 pm, 1:10 hours into the recording)

Karen O'Donnell, Director of Parks and Recreation, reviewed the current situation and how the City is complying with recommendations and orders from the Federal to the local level.

Summer camp will be possible if no more than 10 children are in one group, with the same 10 children in that group throughout camp working with the same staff members throughout the camp program.

The workout facilities and pool will open slowly, with limited numbers of people allowed into the centers, probably with reservations for exercising during specific time periods.

The Department is also looking into virtual programs to replace in person activities. For instance, we have launched a series of virtual classes and learning programs in the past week.

The rule of 10 or fewer persons in one gathering still allows outdoor classes with up to 9 participants and an instructor. The Department is looking into how to offer as many of these programs as feasible.

This year in lieu of a printed summer program catalog the City is publishing detailed information on our website. The fall program guide will be published if we can foresee enough opportunities to offer programs when the deadline to submit the printed content arrives in June.

The City will not open pools on Memorial Day, but is looking to potentially open July 1, if that proves feasible.

Facilities in parks, like restrooms, tennis courts and basketball courts remain closed for now.

Dog parks remain open because staff have observed that citizens are maintaining social distancing in those dog parks, and removing their pets droppings consistently.

Gold panning and water access remain closed due to demands on staff who would provide water rescuing.

We are looking at having staff work in two groups, Monday-Wednesday-Friday and Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday, with one person in each vehicle to maintain social distancing.

Seasonal hiring of park workers is on hold at present, but the full-time staff are working hard to fill the resulting gap. Most of our recreation staff are working from home. Some may do other than their usual kinds of work in order to keep the parks open. We have also kept our part-time employees at work, so we do not lose them to other jobs and then have problems recalling or replacing them.

Ms. O'Donnell reviewed other details from the memo to Council that came in the packet for this meeting.

Council had questions and comments:

Will memberships be restarted? Right now, we are not collecting membership fees for classes, with a few, limited exceptions. Fees to visit the recreation centers are under review, because the current situation restricts people's access and the duration of the visits.

Is the ash tree treatment program going to continue? Ms. O'Donnell will get back to us with an answer.

Will programs like art, yoga Pilates continue? Are those teachers staff or contractors? Yes, these programs will continue, and the instructors are a mix of staff and contractors. Can we help the instructors market these programs when offering classes virtually? How to best serve the residents and help the instructors is under consideration along with other related issues, especially passes and fees for individual classes.

Councilmember Urban mentioned an app that encourages bicycle riders to speed along routes to compete virtually with other riders, encouraging speeding. Ms. O'Donnell and the PIO are working on signage and public education efforts to address speeding on bicycles among pedestrians along Clear Creek.

Council asked about enforcing dog leash ordinances. Chief Murtha reported that there have been several complaints about dogs running free. PD has assigned marshals and Code Enforcement Officers to monitor and react.

Councilmember Hultin thanked Ms. O'Donnell for her thorough reports. She also commented that pedestrians with dogs on long leashes represent a danger to bicyclists, pets and pedestrians alike, and that fact should be included in any public education or information effort.

4. Staff Report(s)

Mr. Goff discussed the CARES Act funds that Jefferson County received, and how the County Commissioners will allocate portions of those funds to municipalities in the County. Decisions are expected quickly, but it may take several weeks before the City sees its portion of those funds.

5. Elected Officials' Report(s)

- a) Procedure for sharing comments in Wheat Ridge Speaks with the Council and public

City Clerk Kirkpatrick reported on his work with Lauren Mikulak and Allison Scheck into the options for including comments from Wheat Ridge Speaks in Council meeting minutes and study session notes. Going forward the comments recorded under Wheat Ridge Speaks will be included in the minutes/notes adjacent to the agenda the comment addresses.

Dr. Kirkpatrick also thanked the first responders, police officers, tradespeople, doctors, nurses, delivery drivers and supermarket workers who have done so much for so many.

He noted that at this hour few if any of those essential people are listening, so he urged everyone to thank them in person whenever we can.

Council questions and comments:

Council does not believe it is necessary or effective to read comments into the record from Wheat Ridge Speaks, although Councilmembers may choose to read communications from constituents into the record per Council Rules.

Elected Officials Reports

Councilmember Hoppe reminded us that this Thursday May 7th is the biggest fundraiser of the year for the Family Tree. The event will be held virtually, and this year it will be free to attend. There are silent auction items for sale: www.thefamilytree.org.

The Mayor thanked the residents of Wheat Ridge for their cooperation and continuing efforts to help one another during this pandemic. He again thanked the first responders, doctors, nurses, and essential business employees who have worked so hard and done so much to help the City and our people.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session adjourned at 9:00 pm, exactly.

APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL ON May 11, 2020.



Steve Kirkpatrick, City Clerk



Janeece Hoppe, Mayor Pro Tem