

STUDY SESSION NOTES
CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO
City Council Chambers 7500 W. 29th Avenue
June 15, 2020

Mayor Bud Starker called the Study Session to order at 6:31 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.

Councilmembers present: Amanda Weaver, Judy Hutchinson, Zach Urban, Rachel Hultin, Korey Stites, Valerie Nosler Beck, and Leah Dozeman.

Also present: City Clerk, Steve Kirkpatrick; City Manager Patrick Goff; Community Development Director, Ken Johnstone; Director of Administration Allison Scheck; Police Chief Christopher Murtha; Director of Planning, Lauren Mikulak; Senior Neighborhood Planner, Jeff Hirt, guests and interested citizens.

Citizen Comment on Agenda Items –

No one came forward to speak.

(The Mayor noted that there may have been citizens who could not call in because of an outage of some cell phone providers in the area.)

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 Council 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, including items that include a public hearing (verbatim, if the comments do not contain lascivious language or unlawful hate speech).

All citizen comments for this study session regarded Item 1 on the Agenda, and those comments appear below in the section for Item 1.

Re: Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Engagement Implementation

The proposed plan is well and good, but it isn't enough. Even if everything proceeds as hoped, it will take time to show results. Meanwhile, many of us have already made our feelings known, most obviously during the last election when we decisively turned down a proposed high density development. The City Council needs to take actions that will prove its intent to listen. Namely, 1) Delay passing any ordinance that is likely to irritate a significant portion of the neighborhood.

- Respect the rights of neighborhood residents and property owners. We need the opportunity to provide meaningful input during the decision making process. True, the developers have made an investment in property, but so have all of the property owners in that neighborhood. It's more important to listen to the residents than to a developer.
- Acknowledge that it is virtually impossible for residents to collect the necessary signatures in the stipulated time under the present 'safer at home' conditions. The usual process would put all of the petition carriers at risk, and would be a health risk for the residents as well.
- City Council has already acknowledged the petition problem with respect to liquor licenses, the same courtesy needs to be extended to citizens.
- Show respect for residents by not passing any ordinances that involve a zone change while Coronavirus safeguards are in effect.

2) Take actions that prove citizens have been heard.

We've spoken at City Council meetings, we've written letters, we've had a successful referendum, and yet as far as we can tell, the City is ignoring us.

- Some positive steps could be taken immediately. For instance, increase setbacks, limit heights on infill proposals, address bulk plane concerns, require vegetation on every site, and respect residential zones.

3) For every proposal that comes before City Council, there needs to be feedback from a minimum number of neighbors. (That number would depend on the potential impact of the project.)

- Instead of passively waiting for citizen input, it's the responsibility of the City to reach out to people, making sure that they're aware of what's being proposed.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on these matters.

Thank you.

06/15/2020 10:18 am

Judy Capra
7070 W 43rd Ave
Wheat Ridge, 80033

I am pleased to learn that the Wheat Ridge Neighborhood Revitalization Study (NRS) is about to move forward and am hopeful that the City and its planning staff meeting with individual neighborhoods will provide a road map for future (and current) re-development within our city.

There are several current, in-progress re-zoning and re-development projects that have many of our City's residents concerned, namely the re-zoning at 38th Avenue and Kipling from Residential to a Planned Residential Development (PRD), and changes to height restrictions at Clear Creek Crossing to enable SCL-Lutheran Medical Center to build a rooftop helipad and to allow for higher ceilings within the hospital's complex. Since the City is beginning its NRS project, I would like to see both of these projects opened for consideration by the NRS staff and neighborhood participants. Doing this would disallow any thought that these projects are being rushed through City Council, during the current pandemic, in order to avoid either NRS consideration or a referendum.

I have often heard, at City Council and Planning Commission meetings, that rezoning decisions must be accomplished expeditiously in order to accommodate contractors' schedules, or the current real estate market, or the hiring of sub-contractors. However, I think this is the time to accommodate the needs and wishes of those of us who live in these neighborhoods. The NRS project seems designed to do just that.

I do not understand why a developer, or a hospital board, or any other real estate purchaser, would buy property to develop before the zoning necessary for the developer's use is determined, and yet that happens over and over here in Wheat Ridge. Repeatedly we citizens hear that "if this rezoning application is denied, I won't be able to utilize my property." Or, the "only profitable way to utilize this property is by building high density, attached housing." If property is purchased for a use other than for what it is zoned, then the purchaser takes a chance that rezoning won't happen. The City is under no obligation to insure that a real estate purchase is profitable to the purchaser. I do, however, see an obligation for the City to insure that zoning rules and regulations, codified by City Council and its citizens, and relied upon by its citizens, is properly enforced.

In closing, let's give the new NRS a chance to do its work, starting with these mentioned projects.

**Thank you,
Kathy Havens**

06/15/2020 11:32 am

**Kathryn Havens
7060 West 39th Ave
Wheat Ridge, 80033**

1. Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Engagement Implementation

Discussion began at 6:34pm, approximately 0:03 minutes into the recording of the session.

In July 2019, City Council adopted an update to the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy. The original 2005 NRS set forth a work plan for the subsequent 10+ years that the city has followed extensively, with examples noted in the 2019 NRS Update. Similarly, the 2019 NRS Update sets forth a work plan for the next 10+ years with two priority recommendations. The first priority recommendation is to spend 1-2 years better understanding what issues and opportunities are most important to residents at the neighborhood level through focused listening and engagement. The second priority recommendation is completion of existing projects and fresh planning efforts on the City's primary corridors such as Wadsworth Boulevard, 38th Avenue, and 44th Avenue.

Staff (Ken Johnstone, Lauren Mikulak and Jeff Hirt) delivered to Council a detailed presentation about this item, its purpose using a PowerPoint slide deck.

- Provide an update on the council-adopted 2019 Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy (NRS) priority recommendation for focused neighborhood engagement;
- Introduce new Community Development Department staff hired to implement the engagement program and provide an update on other NRS hiring recommendations;
- Share a proposed framework for the Neighborhood Engagement Program; and
- Seek council input on a few key questions most considerably that the framework identifies criteria that staff will use to determine sequencing of neighborhoods. Do Councilmembers have any additional thoughts or considerations on how the city sequences neighborhoods for focused listening and engagement?

Councilmembers had questions and comments:

- What options do we have in terms of lifting the hiring freeze for the open position for neighborhood engagement? Staff responded that Community Development staff are moving forward with the plan by reassigning other staff to this effort until the funding for the position is available, given the coronavirus pandemic and it's still uncertain impact on City revenue and expenses.
- Looking at the overall framework, let's be sure that we're all speaking the same language, using the same terms consistently, and clearly describing how the planning and zoning processes operate.
- Inevitably this process will bring forward issues related to code enforcement, zoning changes and other issues/complaints. Let's make sure that those citizens' comments and concerns are directed to the right departments and staff members. There need to be follow-through on each citizen's concerns.

- We also need to include citizens' concerns about current and near term future planning and zoning issues as we begin a dialogue on longer-term issues.
- All of these efforts need to include public information, education and communication about specific development proposals and sites involving proposed zoning changes, and how people can effectively and efficiently to staff so that staff remain informed and engaged.
- Mr. Goff reported that staff are working with LocalWorks to provide educational and informational sessions about these planning and zoning issues and processes.
- How will we communicate with residents who do not have or use smart devices and computers? Mr. Hirt answered that staff will need to continue developing in-person networks and public information processes that involve face-to-face conversations with citizens individually and in small groups.
- Council suggested strongly that we need to have plenty of neighborhood meetings, well publicized in advance, so that residents' voices are heard.
- Mr. Johnstone also reviewed the tools and media available to staff and elected officials to engage with one another as needed and to ensure widespread collaboration.
- Our engagement strategy needs to include input from neighborhood residents, commercial corridor interests and adjacent neighborhoods. A conversation that focuses on a particular area within one of the designated neighborhoods often if not usually impacts residents and businesses that may be some distance away.
- Let's take care that we do not confuse people who believe they live in one neighborhood but are labeled as living in a larger area also called a neighborhood. Staff responded that perhaps we need two different terms for "neighborhood;" one as used in the NRS and another term for more localized common parlance (e.g. Fruitdale vs. Prospect Park).
- How will we handle the timing of certain land use processes as we plan going forward, while we are engaging neighborhoods for their view on the ideal future? Mr. Johnstone responded that because property owners' also have rights these processes will continue unless Council decides to enact a city-wide moratorium on specific actions or changes. Perhaps the timing of certain neighborhood revitalization activities and meetings will depend upon the level of activity and the number of proposed projects in that specific area of the city, or adjacent areas.
- Please, explain how the decision was reached to subdivide District I into two neighborhoods, and how those divisions will participate and plan not only within those neighborhoods but also across the whole Council district.

2. Staff Report(s)

Discussion began at 7:40 pm, approximately 1:10 into the recording of the session.

Mr. Goff reported that a number of residents have asked specific questions about Wheat Ridge Police Department's policies and procedures. Chief Murtha is

enthusiastically engaged in answering their specific enquiries, a process he has long wanted to engage in but was thwarted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Councilmember Stites asked Chief Murtha how the Police Department would respond to a riot or looting situation. The Chief answered that each situation has to be thoughtfully considered and the response measured so that it improves conditions, not make them worse.

Chief Murtha also indicated that he will make those decisions in consultation with other city leaders, among both staff and elected officials. Generally he takes a softer approach to some situations than other jurisdictions, up to the point where there are significant risks to property, citizen safety and human life. Evidence-based best practices show that establishing a riot control line facing peaceful demonstrators rarely has as much positive effect as other approaches, including walking among the assembled citizens and speaking with them, sans riot gear, helmets, etc.

Chief Murtha thanked the City leaders for their support and for engaging with him to respond to residents.

3. Elected Officials' Report(s)

Councilmember Urban reported that the committee reviewing applications in the Small Business Revitalization Program met today and plans to announce decisions in the next few days.

Councilmember Hultin reminded people that she and Councilmember Dozeman are holding a community forum tomorrow evening, in a virtual format. Councilmember Dozeman commented that she is looking forward to listening to residents and their concerns to improve connections between the citizens and our government.

Councilmember Nosler Beck thanked Chief Murtha for joining her for in person, virtual discussions with residents, to listen and to respond to concerns.


The Mayor thanked the Community Development staff for their report this evening.

If you have not completed your 2020 Census questionnaire, please, do so.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session adjourned at 7:56 pm.

APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL ON June 22, 2020.



Steve Kirkpatrick, City Clerk



Janeece Hoppe, Mayor Pro Tem