

SPECIAL STUDY SESSION NOTES
CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO
City Council Chambers 7500 W. 29th Avenue
March 8, 2021

Upon adjournment of the Regular City Council Meeting, the Mayor called this Special Study Session to order at 7:23 p.m.

This meeting was conducted as a VIRTUAL MEETING.

No members of the Council 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: Amanda Weaver, Judy Hutchinson, Zach Urban, Janeece Hoppe, Rachel Hultin, Korey Stites, Valerie Nosler Beck, and Leah Dozeman.

Also present: City Attorney Gerald Dahl; City Clerk, Steve Kirkpatrick; City Treasurer Chris Miller, City Manager Patrick Goff; Director of Administration Allison Scheck, guests and interested citizens.

Citizen Comment on Agenda Items –

No one came forward to speak.

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).

There were no citizen comments entered into Wheat Ridge Speaks related to this session.

1. Plan for returning to in-person Council meetings

Mr. Goff gave a review of the plans nearby municipalities have made to return to in person Council members.

Allison Scheck, Administrative Services Director, gave a brief overview of the virtual meeting resolution Council passed one year ago. She explained that members of City Council now would like to discuss the possibility of returning to Council Chambers at City Hall for meetings.

There are a number of factors to consider including current public health orders, accessibility to the public, timing, integration of technology and the health and safety of elected officials, staff and members of the public.

She identified three main options for consideration. Other options might also be worth considering and can be evaluated based on Council's direction. A recent upgrade to the audio and camera equipment in Chambers has increased potential for these options.

Option 1 – Continue Virtual Meetings

- Virtual meetings continue via Zoom
- Members of the public may participate virtually or may RSVP to attend in-person

Option 2 – Hybrid Format

- Four members of Council attend in-person and are spaced at every other position on the dais to maintain social distancing
- Remaining members of Council attend via Zoom
- The City Clerk may choose to attend in-person and sit in the usual position
- Staff may attend in person or virtually
- Members of the public may RSVP to attend in-person or participate virtually

Option 3 – Elected Officials and Staff In-Person

- Utilize an expanded version of the typical Study Session setup, meaning that additional tables are placed to create a large closed rectangle where members of City Council and key staff are distanced appropriately
- City Clerk may sit in the usual position
- The wall partition is pulled back to expand the space into Courts, allowing space for the public to attend in-person
- Meetings are still available via Zoom to elected officials and staff who may feel unwell or are more comfortable participating virtually
- Members of the public may RSVP to attend in-person or participate virtually

The capacity of Council Chambers and the City Court room altogether is 250 persons. However, the need to maintain social distancing requires that we limit onsite attendance to 50 people, including Councilmembers, other elected officials, staff and citizens. All those present will be required to wear masks, maintain 6 feet of distance from others (except those who reside in the same household) and participate in symptom check protocols.

Councilmembers had questions and comments:

Councilmembers thanked the staff for their thoughtful presentation.

Councilmembers and constituents want Council to meet in person in Chambers at the earliest possible time, but not until all are comfortable doing so.

Has anyone suggested that we need to change the schedule/start times for meetings to allow time for screening? The staff opined that added time should not be necessary.

Further discussion of logistical details ensued.

Before we move forward with any plan, we need to be sure that it is safe and comfortable for everyone to attend. Anyone who is not comfortable meeting in Chambers should feel free to participate accordingly virtually.

Some Councilmembers are not comfortable meeting in person until they have been vaccinated. Getting the vaccine should be an individual choice and so should when and how each person will attend or participate virtually. Until vaccines are available for all, we need to be cautious and respectful of individual choices.

Most Councilmembers also believe that we should all be together, whether in person or on Zoom, to ensure a level playing field. Option 2 in the staff presentation (hybrid of in person and virtual attendance by Councilmembers) was generally not preferred.

Perhaps we should agree on some trigger moment, such as the County has been on Green level of the CoVid Dial for a specified period, or that a specified percentage of adults in the County have been vaccinated, before we consider convening in person meetings.

Treasurer Miller asked whether it is time to review and increase the level of security established for Council members. Mr. Goff asked for Council's views on increasing security, including whether to use a magnetometer for all persons entering Council Chambers for a meeting.

If we hold live meetings in Chambers, we need to account for the difficulty hearing speakers and recording the proceedings while speakers wear masks.

However, while the current state of the pandemic is trending in the right direction, any number of factors, such as spring break events or virus variants could upend our plans.

Option 3 was the most popular, with continuation of the current virtual meeting format, (Option 1 in the staff presentation) until it seems very safe, perhaps a month after the County moves to Level Green for an uninterrupted period of at least a month.

There should be a specific plan for announcing a schedule to return to Council Chambers well in advance of the first in person Council session, so that everyone knows when the transition will occur.

Once we do return to in-person meetings in Chambers perhaps the City should continue offering the public ways to participate virtually.

How shall we establish the ground rules for a Councilmember to choose to attend virtually? Will that member be marked present? The proposed consensus does not address this issue, but we can review and adjust Council Rules to reflect the current realities.

Councilmember Hoppe proposed a consensus to continue with Option 1 until it is safe to go with Option 3. Before we implement a plan to return to in-person meetings, we will require that the County CoVid level has been at Green for at least a month and that all elected City officials and staff who attend Council sessions have had the opportunity for vaccination. When we establish a date to begin meeting in person again, we will issue clear information using multiple channels to ensure the public is well informed.

Consensus achieved.

Councilmembers thanked the staff for their extraordinary job over the past year, as we reinvented government and continued to serve the citizens of the City while we did all of that adapting, improvising and overcoming obstacles.

2. Staff Report(s)

Nothing further at this time.

3. Elected Officials' Report(s)

Nothing further, as this session immediately followed a Regular Council Meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The Special Study Session adjourned at 8:14 pm.

APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL ON March 22, 2021.



Steve Kirkpatrick, City Clerk



Janeece Hoppe, Mayor Pro Tem