

SPECIAL STUDY SESSION NOTES
CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO
City Council Chambers 7500 W. 29th Avenue
February 28, 2022

Upon adjournment of the Regular City Council Meeting, the Mayor called this Special Study Session to order after a brief recess at 8:08 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, Scott Ohm, 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; Homeless Navigator, Rebekah Raudabaugh; Kelli Barker with the Jefferson County Homeless Network, guests and interested citizens.

Public Comment on Agenda Items –

No one came forward to comment – public comment was opened during the Regular Council Meeting.

Note about Wheat Ridge Speaks:

The public 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 public comments entered into Wheat Ridge Speaks related to this session.

1. Homeless Navigation Program Update

Issue

The previous community meeting on homelessness took place in May 2021, and the last Homeless Navigation Program update was in August 2021. The purpose of this study session item is for the City's Homeless Navigator to provide a general update to City Council regarding the Homeless Navigation Program, Housing Navigation Centers and the latest citywide efforts in support of addressing homelessness.

Staff Report

Rebekah Raudabaugh, Homeless Navigator gave a detailed report on how the position works closely with the local business community, constituents, metro-area non-profit providers and government agencies.

This includes:

- Weekly outreach efforts which consist of contacting individuals living unsheltered and offering resources and basic need items such as socks, water, snacks, etc. to build rapport
- Attending Municipal Court to provide support for persons experiencing homelessness
- Completing intakes for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and assessing client's needs
- Assisting clients with obtaining vital documents
- Making referrals for healthcare, mental health, substance misuse, legal issues, and benefits
- Navigating clients to identify a pathway towards housing
- Assisting clients with housing searches, applications, and deposits

She also gave an update that in October 2021, the City of Golden hired a Navigator to solely provide services in Golden. The City of Wheat Ridge Homeless Navigation Program worked directly with the new Navigator to provide training on the already in place program and transfer over the current Golden caseload. The City of Wheat Ridge Homeless Navigation Program now only services the cities of Wheat Ridge and Edgewater.

Kelli Barker, Jeffco Regional Housing Coordinator, reported on the County's effort to help those experiencing homelessness. She gave an overview supported by media/ PowerPoint.

Councilmember questions and comments:

Several Councilmembers thanked both presenters, not only for their presentations tonight but also for their hard work to address issues related to those experiencing homelessness and for providing so much help to that population.

CM Hoppe asked about the process of obtaining housing vouchers. What is the process if someone has not pre-registered? Is there a business card-sized handout we could get to pass along to those we encounter who are experiencing homelessness? Ms. Raudabaugh provided a detailed answer; yes, there are provisions to help those who have not pre-registered and outreach items or handouts are available. She will create the small handout.

CM Hoppe also asked about people who have been charged with offenses related to homelessness, such as panhandling or shoplifting. Is there any policy change you would like to see that would help move this effort forward without needlessly or even heartlessly punishing these people? Ms. Rudabaugh gave a detailed answer.

CM Hoppe expressed condolences on the recent loss of one of our clients experiencing homelessness.

CM Ohm asked whether staff could share any of the information presented by the Subarea Plan on 44th Avenue. Mr. Goff gave a detailed reply.

CM Ohm also asked about recent incidents where porta-potties have been burned. He asked what can be done to prevent or alleviate this problem. Mr. Goff gave a detailed answer, reporting on current and prior efforts by the City to address the need for not only restrooms but also showers and laundry.

Mr. Ohm commented that he once used portable facilities when he was fighting wildfires for the Federal government. He wondered if there is such equipment that firefighters are not using during the winter. Staff agreed to pursue the possibility. The major cost issue turns on the fact that we would need to provide staffing for these facilities, to protect the equipment from vandals and thieves and to maintain an orderly service.

CM Nosler Beck asked about sharps containers and other public health issues. Mr. Lovato gave an extensive and detailed reply. He reported that he expects sharps containers to be placed in our parks later this spring.

CM Hoppe commented that Fruitdale residents are asking for the sharps containers in their parks, and they may be able to give testimonials on their experience when the program begins in their area. She also talked about how to safeguard porta-potties with digital code locks to help deter vandals and arsonists.

CM Hultin profusely thanked Ms. Barker and Ms. Rudabaugh. She reported on some specific signs of progress in helping those experiencing homelessness and commented on how important direct contacts are. Please, describe the qualifying Census Tract program requirements. Ms. Barker gave some specific details and pointed to online resources.

CM Hultin also added support to CM Hoppe's ideas based on her own experiences as well. She keeps transit passes with her to help people needing them. She also asked how we could provide telephones to this population when they need to make phone

calls to access services. Ms. Raudabaugh reported on currently available resources for making calls.

CM Dozeman expressed her appreciation for the presenters hard work. Are their possible means to inform the public about what the City and County are doing to help those experiencing homelessness and ways residents can provide help safely? Mr. Goff gave a detailed reply.

CM Nosler Beck reiterated and emphasize support for CM Hoppe's suggestion that the City provide some kind of small card or other handout people can give to those they encounter who are experiencing homelessness. Mr. Goff gave a reply about current resources like the ones CM Nosler Beck is discussing, and the possibility of providing a handout that our residents could carry and provide to those they encounter who need the services.

CM Stites also thanked those who attended recent meetings with him and CM Weaver. If you can find it in Wheat Ridge, buy it in Wheat Ridge.

Mayor Starker also thanked the presenters for both their effort to inform us tonight and for their hard work to serve those experiencing homelessness. He asked Ms. Barker about the financing for the Homeless Navigation Center north of here. He mentioned a number of funding examples and asked what resources Wheat Ridge might access.

Staff Report(s)

Mr. Goff commented about a proposed collective bargaining statute under discussion in the legislature (no bill introduced yet). The CML will oppose any such bill as too overbearing and an encroachment on our Home Rule City rights. This would be an unfunded mandate as well. The City of Arvada has already passed a resolution against any such bill.

CM Nosler Beck commented and suggested that we remain neutral on this matter for now. She would like for City employees to participate in collective bargaining, to provide every opportunity for workers to advocate for themselves.

CM Hultin expressed her agreement with CM Nosler Beck's comments. CML does a great job. We should have a dialogue within our City about collective bargaining and our City employees. She also wants to remain neutral and not send a letter about this matter from the City to CML.

CM Dozeman also opined that we can remain neutral for the time being, and perhaps leverage our Home Rule status as necessary.

CM Ohm asked if such a bill passed, would we have to obey it regardless of our Home Rule Charter. Mr. Dahl gave a detailed reply, using the recent trends in court decisions in Colorado regarding similar issues. He doubts that we could exempt ourselves using the Home Rule Charter status, depending on the eventual language in whatever measure passes, if any.

CM Ohm asked if passing such legislation would erode the rights of Home Rule Municipalities. Mr. Dahl recalled several examples of cases where courts curtailed Home Rule City options based on legislation stating that the matters addressed are of concern statewide. In some cases, the Courts have ruled that Home Rule prevails and in other cases eroded those rights.

CM Hoppe raised the question of how and when the City would change from neutral to advocating a position for the benefits of our City.

CM Stites is also okay to stay neutral for now, but we should monitor the situation and change that neutrality depending on what legislation is introduced. Mr. Dahl and Mr. Goff commented that the current discussions support a bill that would mandate allowing collective bargaining.

Consensus reached to take no action and remain neutral for the time being.

Elected Officials' Report(s)

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

The Mayor noted our progress on important matters this evening and thanked the staff for their hard work.

ADJOURNMENT

The Special Study Session adjourned at 9:38 pm.

APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL ON March 28, 2022.



Steve Kirkpatrick, City Clerk



Rachel Hultin, Mayor Pro Tem