

**STUDY SESSION NOTES  
CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO  
Hybrid - Virtual Meeting**

**October 3, 2022**

Mayor Pro-Tem Janeece Hoppe called the Study Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

This meeting was conducted both as a virtual meeting and hybrid, where some members of the Council or City staff were physically present at the Municipal building, and some members of the public attended in person as well. A quorum of members (eight) of Council were present in Council Chambers for this session.

Mayor ProTem Hoppe welcomed the Council, other elected officials, staff and interested citizens. She also explained the virtual/hybrid meeting format, how citizens will have the opportunity to be heard, and the procedures and policies to be followed.

Council members present Scott Ohm, Amanda Weaver, Judy Hutchinson, Korey Stites, Valerie Nosler Beck, Janeece Hoppe, and Leah Dozeman.

Mayor Starker and CM Rachel Hultin were traveling out of town.

Also present: City Attorney, Gerald Dahl; City Manager Patrick Goff; City Clerk, Steve Kirkpatrick; Assistant to the City Manager, Marianne Schilling; Homeless Navigator, Rebecca Rudabaugh; Housing Navigator, Kory Kolar; interested citizens and guests.

**Public's Right to Speak**

Kate Zaback, 4310 Garland St. came to discuss the proposed closing of 3 neighborhood elementary schools in Wheat Ridge. We were blindsided by the Jeffco District plan to close 3 elementary schools in Wheat Ridge, with little or no community input. Many of the schools on the list for consolidation have very different neighborhoods. They acknowledged none of the history of school closings. She understands the district's dilemma, but there is no plan to address the issues we should be addressing: curricula, special needs programs, and transportation.

Cassie Hertert, 4150 Carr St. – came to oppose the school closing plans. She grew up in Wheat Ridge, attending Kullerstrand and Wilmore Davis. She moved here from NW Denver where she hopes to raise her children in our great schools. We have a budget crisis that needs to be addressed. However, the current plan does not address key needs for students and families, especially those with special needs, who will attend schools with no appropriate program offerings. Please oppose these changes and ask for a collaborative solution.

Morgan Richards, 3255 Ames St. – spoke as a parent of teenagers, to raise the issue of equity in our schools. She quoted a number of statistics related to the plan now on the table, and the issues that plan does not address well or at all. For instance, there should be an equal distribution of funds per pupil in all of our schools, which at present

there is not. Please, champion our community and demand that these school consolidations are more equitable and inclusive.

**Note about Wheat Ridge Speaks:**

Members of 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 the public 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.

*No comments appeared in Wheat Ridge Speaks for this session of Council.*

**1. Homeless Navigation Update**

**Issue**

The most recent Homeless Navigation Program update was in February 2022. The purpose of this study session item is to introduce the Housing Navigator and for both Navigators to provide a general update to City Council regarding the Homeless Navigation Program.

**Staff Reports**

Mr. Goff and Ms. Schilling introduced the Homeless Navigator Rebekah Raudabaugh, and Housing Navigator, Kory Kolar, who spoke on recent accomplishments and current plans going forward. Their guiding principles informed the work of the Navigator:

- 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 and trust
- Attending Municipal Court to provide support for persons experiencing homelessness
- Completing intakes for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and assessing clients' 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

Mr. Goff discussed the recent history of efforts to open homeless navigation centers in Jefferson County. Arvada and Lakewood recently severed their joint effort with a firm called Blue Line and a new plan is under development.

### **Councilmembers had questions and comments:**

Councilmembers asked detailed questions about several topics, engaging in discussion among themselves and with staff, who answered their questions in detail:

- Thanked the staff for their report and more so for their hard work.
- If people want to contribute either funds or in kind goods for the homeless hygiene kits, how can they do that? Staff provided a detailed answer.
- Just today, like many days, CM Stites saw people visiting the lobby at City Hall seeking information about services. He asked how the Homelessness staff will work with that population, given the hotel and motel ordinance passed recently. Mr. Goff provided a detailed answer.
- What happens when a person needs shelter and they have a pet, what can we do to house their pet? Staff replied that Foothills Animal Shelter will provide lodging for pets.
- What kinds of services for the unhoused do nearby municipalities provide? Again, staff provided a detailed answer.

### **2. Ethics Code**

#### **Issue**

Home Rule cities in Colorado may conduct their own ethics procedures and investigations if they pass a local ethics ordinance.

#### **Staff Reports**

City Attorney Gerald Dahl spoke on the issue including prior action of the CC in 2019 and 2020 where council considered an ordinance prior. Items under consideration for an ordinance could include but not be limited to:

- Gift Bans
- Suggested language for a Wheat Ridge ethics code
- Conflicts of Interest
- Appearance of Impropriety
- Enforcement

### **Councilmembers had questions and comments:**

CM thanked Mr. Dahl for his presentation along with his excellent preparation and groundwork.

CM Ohm asked about “safe harbor,” provisions in a possible ethics ordinance; what does the term mean and how would we apply it? Mr. Dahl gave a detailed reply.

Several CM expressed support for proposing a local ethics ordinance.

Several members in previous Councils have expressed concern that there should be an appeal process following any action on ethics by the Council under a possible local

ethics ordinance. Would there be an appeal process? Mr. Dahl discussed options in detail for possible provisions in a local ordinance.

CM Hoppe proposed a **consensus** to direct staff and the City Attorney to move forward with drafting a local ethics ordinance including an appeal process.

### **Consensus attained.**

### **3. Proposed Wheat Ridge Elementary School Closures**

#### **Issue**

On August 25, 2022, the Jeffco Public Schools staff made a recommendation to the Board of Education for school closures and consolidations effective for the 2023-24 school year. A total of sixteen elementary schools are proposed for closure, of which, three are in Wheat Ridge. New Classical Academy at Vivian is proposed to close and consolidate with Stober. Wilmore-Davis is proposed to close and consolidate with Stevens. Kullerstrand is proposed to close and consolidate with Prospect Valley. Councilmembers Stites and Nosler Beck received consensus from City Council at the September 26, 2022, regular meeting to discuss options of drafting a letter to the Board of Education and/or approval of a resolution in opposition of the school closings. Following is their proposed outline of an agenda:

- Overview of JeffCo School District School closure plan and timeline.
- Update on Wheat Ridge data and schools closing and schools receiving schools.
- Review the draft letter asking for postponing the November 10th vote to allow for time for a more robust community engagement strategy and/or vote no on 16 school closures on November 10, 2022.

#### **Staff Reports**

City Manager Patrick Goff, spoke on the issue including the criteria used by Jeffco Schools to develop the list of schools recommended for consolidation.

#### **Councilmembers had questions and comments:**

CM Hoppe expressed her concern that she does not see many other options for the Jeffco School District to pursue other than closing schools. She asked that any letter say, "...we the undersigned members of the City Council, ..." and not the entire Council.

CM also discussed what a possible letter might ask the School Board to do. Of course, the letter will object to closing three of our elementary schools. However, we should also ask for a better proposal that addresses transportation, curriculum, special needs programs, and other local concerns.

Few would dispute the assertion that the public engagement in this decision making process has been sorely lacking at best.

Wheat Ridge has already seen too many school closings. We lost a junior high school and now 3 more elementary schools. Next, they may come with a plan to close Wheat Ridge High School. We need a conversation addressing a bigger list of issues for both the current situation and for middle-term and long-term plans.

This is a flashback to 2017, when CM Stites and Dozeman met with district officials about just this kind of planning. The district ignored the recommendations from that group going forward. Might the District do the same thing again? CM Dozeman opined that since there has been a total absence of community input to date, we can expect more of the same.

CM Hoppe discussed her family's experience with school closing in the past. When you look at the process so far, the decisions seem based on data. Because the School District must reduce its budget, they chose this process. A lot of people are grieving the loss of these schools, but all we have done in the past is "kick the can down the road," while the district addresses those with the ability to organize and oppose closing their schools. Therefore, she will not support a letter or resolution, but hopes that other CM will do what they feel that they need to do in the current situation.

If we oppose closing one or more of our schools, then we need to have rebuttal arguments addressing the criteria the District is using based on current data and projected population growth and the demand for seats in elementary schools going forward. For instance, at some point there will be people living in the current Lutheran Legacy campus. How should that fact influence current and future planning?

CM Stites proposed a **consensus** to move forward with a draft letter to the Jeffco School Board, as our elected officials, from "the undersigned members of the City Council," seeking reconsideration of the closing list; addressing the local issues of importance to our children, parents, and neighborhoods; and addressing the work already done at the Futures Conference.

### **Consensus attained.**

#### **4. Staff Report(s)**

Noting tonight.

#### **5. Elected Officials' Report(s)**

CM Hutchinson,

CM Ohm attended the Multi-family Conference this week. Wheat Ridge has no affordable housing program, which puts the City at a disadvantage when developers consider projects. He also heard someone opine that "live, work, play," is dead as an amenity. What people want is events like the Carnation Festival. CM Ohm and Hultin had a District II meeting at Happiness Gardens Saturday, October 1. He asked about affordable housing in their District. That phrase has a negative connotation; one

suggested instead that we call it “housing for people.” He also heard from his wife that the term homeless is no longer politically correct; the new term is “unhoused.”

CM Nosler Beck reported that her constituents expressed their concern that encouraging composting will only attract more rats. The rat population across the country is exploding. However, the residents oppose poisoning the pests because that poison also kills the rats’ natural enemies: raptors, canines, and large cats, including pets. Mr. Goff commented that the City staff do and will intervene when a large infestation occurs. CM Ohm reported on a method to kill rats with dry ice; the sublimating carbon dioxide suffocates rats when confined to a closed box.

The Mayor thanked everyone for a productive meeting, and encouraged us to drive, cycle and walk carefully to protect one another.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Study Session adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

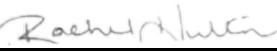
APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL ON November 14, 2022.

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Steve Kirkpatrick, City Clerk

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Rachel Hultin, Mayor Pro Tem