

STUDY SESSION NOTES

CITY OF WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO

City Council Chambers 7500 W. 29th Avenue

April 17, 2017

Mayor Joyce Jay called the Study Session to order at 6:30 p.m.

Council members present: Monica Duran, Janeece Hoppe, Kristi Davis, Zachary Urban, George Pond, Tim Fitzgerald, Larry Mathews, Genevieve Wooden

Also present: City Clerk, Janelle Shaver; City Manager, Patrick Goff; Public Works Director, Scott Brink; Community Development Director, Ken Johnstone; Parks Director, Joyce Manwaring; other staff, guests and interested citizens

CITIZEN COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Susan Miller (WR) is an active WRHS parent. She reported on the conditions at WRHS, brought on by the School District's actions, that led to the resignations of Principal Griff Wirth and two top assistant principals.

The low reading levels of incoming freshmen often lead to substance abuse, classroom disruption and dropping out. The District's failure to send students who are prepared for high school is not realistic, but Mr. Wirth and his team have spent funds on literacy intervention and counselling, and have delivered best in the District in terms of student achievement growth for all students. They've also built high performing new programs like STEM and Career Pathways. Despite the obstacles, Mr. Wirth and the teachers have kept things going.

Recently the District demanded that WRHS pick up the \$150K cost for the GT specialists (Gifted & Talented) – something the District has funded for 10 years. Rather than learn from the successes at WRHS, the District gave Mr. Wirth the impossible choice of choosing between the low readers and the GT kids. Enrollment is declining.

Kevin Carrol has insisted the GT program be funded with specific monies – forcing the school to choose between the most vulnerable and the GT students. Mr. Wirth and the two assistant principals have resigned. The District reversed its decision, but the damage has been done.

The City should be very concerned about what will happen if the GT program is moved to another school. WRHS will lose faculty and students, and become a Title 1 school like Jefferson and Alameda. The economic damage to the City will be long lasting. She suggested that while the District talks about \$25M to move 6th grade to middle school, maybe they could talk about \$1M to fund the GT program for ten years at WRHS to ensure its longevity.

Ian Clark (WR) and **Evan Clark** (WR) donated their minutes to John Clark.

John Clark (WR) As a graduate and active parent of Wheat Ridge schools and local small business owner he believes it's time for the City to stand up to the school district. We don't have an abundance of schools in WR, yet the District is constantly tearing our schools up, closing schools or threatening to, pulling funds, etc. Great schools lead to great cities. We've spent 6 years and a million dollars trying to figure out the lanes on 38th Ave, plus all the meetings over WalMart and left turn lanes on Wadsworth. What time or effort has been directed towards our schools? Someone should ask why the District is destroying our WR schools? Is it because we have an older demographic that may not vote their way? Does the District have faulty numbers? The City reports families are moving in, but the District keeps closing schools. Is it jealousy for the great things being done at WR schools despite District policies? Without great schools, talk about vision and economic development and walkability and sustainability means nothing. He suggested the school board have a bake sale or fundraiser (like the students have to) to raise money for its raises, instead of closing programs for kids.

1. Staff Reports none

2. Wheat Ridge Education Alliance Update – Genevieve Wooden

Councilmember Wooden introduced the agenda item and moderated the panel discussion.

- She began with background about the Education Alliance.
- The Safety Center at Martensen school is going to have an Open House this Wednesday, April 19 from 3:30 – 5:00pm to exhibit the repurposing of the school.
- Everitt Middle school will be celebrating its 50th anniversary on May 10 with an open house.

Guests included:

Ali Lasell, Jefferson County School Board member

Karen Quambeck, Achievement Director for Jeffco schools; supervises Wheat Ridge and Conifer elementary schools

Principals Griff Wirth (WRHS), Cheryl Clay (Kullerstrand), Anne DiCola (Stober), and Jeff Gomez (Everitt)

Ali Lasell updated the Council on the search for a new Superintendent.

Karen Quambeck updated the Council on

- Principal changes in Wheat Ridge this year (Clay and DiCola) and for next year at Wilmore Davis and Stevens. John Martinez (Wilmore Davis) retired just before Easter; principal from Pleasant View Elem will replace. Stevens' new principal coming from Denver

- The APTT (Academic Parent Teacher Teams) at Stevens and Pennington – where parents and teachers collaborate to set academic goals for students

Anne DiCola gave an update on Stober.

- A math program was closed down so enrollment went down. (296 students in Oct)
- They've been focusing on reading and 21st century learning..
- They have Socratic seminars, even for the kindergarteners.
- They have implemented defined thinking into their classrooms.
- It has been a challenging year with the potential closure.

Cheryl Clay gave an update on Kullerstrand.

- They focus on the whole child – academic, social and emotional needs. Have 236 students, with 80% on free/reduced lunch.
- They are starting to show an increase in achievement.
- Focusing on the 21st Century learner, they have implemented an after-school robotics program this year focusing on the application process. With their digital library they are beginning to share with other school – hoping the programs spreads and there can be some competition in the future. Students develop and learn the coding behind running the robots. They are expanding the program next year.
- They have a new PTA board for next year; the PTA had severely declined, but is growing again.

Jeff Gomez gave an update on Everitt.

- They have addressed clean-up and culture building the last six years.
- Students include 68% on free/reduced lunch, single parent homes, grandparents raising kids, kids with incarcerated parents, and parents without skills and/or resources; this age is a challenging time for the students generally.
- Saturday, April 29th from 10-2 is their Resource Fair (support organizations); expanded to include a carnival this year 5; please join us.
- The 50th anniversary celebration is coming up on May 10.
- Their biggest challenge is the perception of the school and its students. (Very few of their students come from Denver.)

Griff Wirth gave an update from WRHS. Highlights included:

- Focus on 21st "Century learning skills
- The gifted program and Shades of Blue (aviation exploration program)
- The STEM program that brings in professionals with adult level learning who teach adult world soft skills, leadership, and teamwork.
 - The STEM team is taking another car to Detroit next month.
 - This year the STEM team built a Mars rover and took it to a NASA competition in Huntsville, AL where they competed with college students and international students.
 - The STEM team will have a fog wall to show movies/videos at prom this year.

- They've added a construction class taught by industry professionals; by year's end they will have 15 students certified and ready to walk onto a job site.
- Engagement with Careerwise, a new non-profit with 3-year apprentice programs for grades 11, 12, and 13. Students get HS education and work with businesses.
 - Career Explorer is a new program for at-risk kids who will not graduate. Available are programs in construction, hospitality and health care—the top three needed jobs in Colorado. All 28 kids in the programs attend regularly.
 - The 12 hospitality students have finished - earning 35 of 36 certificates possible. Internships are starting.
 - Assisted living centers are eager to get the health care kids to intern with them, followed by careers and helping them get college degrees or extra training.
 - These programs provide hope for a future.
 - This was completely unfunded; cost \$100K for this semester for 30 students; we have to figure out a way to find partners, fund and grow programs like this.

Ms. Lasell addressed the recent school closures. While Stober and Pennington escaped closure, the School Board decided to develop a healthy process to guide them through all future closures. Jeffco schools built in the 1940's and 50's had a capacity of 275-325 and everyone walked to school. It's a different age now. The District has determined that 350-400 students are necessary for a school to be sustainable.

Ms. Quambeck reported the District will be getting bids from a 3rd party to navigate the task force in creating a process and criteria for school closure. Those are difficult decisions, best made in a transparent process with multiple voices at the table.

Discussion followed.

- How can elected officials help? School reps: Know/learn about the schools; visit them. Lasell: Understand school funding; funding is less than it was in the 1980's.
- Ms. Lasell could not assure that Wheat Ridge schools will not be closed in the future, but she has high hopes for the task force and that community will be part of the discussion.
- WRHS and Everitt have high facility condition index (FCI i.e. needs) and were sold as part of the bond issue. WRHS has one of the highest FCI's in the County. The bonds failed, so now available facility funds are going to additions at Dunstan and Drake and elsewhere. Ms. Lasell said those are due to severe overcrowding. Ms. Quambeck reported that overcrowding trumps FCI's.
- If you close schools, please maintain them.
- Reasons the bonds lost? Lasell: We needed more time and clearer messaging.
- Discussion about per pupil funding and mill levy override
- How open enrollment affects school population
- Bussing from overcrowded areas to less crowded areas has not been discussed.

- There are people in the community that would help; PTA's should talk to each other; Reading Buddies is a good program.
- Elementary, middle and WRHS staff do meet regularly regarding transitions and for collaboration. They've also hired a social/emotional counsellor just for our area.
- The Educational Alliance school guide will be updated soon.
- A consideration for future closure should include past closures in that area.
- The WR schools that were listed on the bond -- where are they prioritized now? Lasell: Facilities Dept could answer that. Lasell: Think about the economy of scale.
- Why are charter schools so full? Their pedagogy is different; they fill a need.

There was agreement to meet again in the near future.

A recess was taken at 8:33. The Study Session resumed at 8:40 pm.

3. Ward Station Vision Update – Kenneth Johnstone

With guests Will Wagenlender and Mike Unger (WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff)

Ken Johnstone opened the presentation by reviewing some recent history of events. WSP was hired in July, 2016 to define the vision, and leverage and continue the work the ULI technical advisory panel did.

Will Wagenlender gave a power point presentation about the vision for the TOD site.

- The Vision Objective is to tell citizens, stakeholders and developers what the preferred concept is for future development of the area.
- *Stakeholder feedback:*
 - Market readiness and timing: a traditional TOD requires longer lead time; there's competition from other stations; being unique
 - Site Specific issues: Not very visible; leverage existing land uses and buildings (already quite a bit of employment there); I-70 is an opportunity and a barrier.
 - Land use: Think outside the box (green, recreational, employment); not traditional; dense residential
 - Target audience: Attract new demographics, use events; use existing and potential employers
 - ULI TOD Marketplace: site not well known; some skepticism; it is unique

Base Camp Wheat Ridge's Vision: premier metro area outdoor recreation focused companies and employers; introduce maker spaces and co-working spaces

- *High Level Vision Elements:* maker spaces/co-working spaces; pop-up events; active public spaces; outdoor recreation,
- *Vision Elements*

- Regional park could include bike/ped trails, water sports, water features, community beach, private development opportunities, and public art
- Multimodal connectivity
- Connect both sides of the site with a pedestrian bridge to break the barrier and activate the site
- Linear Green space (a “spine” of the site): bike/ped paths, outdoor exercise nodes, small pocket parks, playground and skate parks, public art,
- Infrastructure investments: Regional park (southern end with the lakes), linear green space, street improvements, traffic signals, pedestrian bridge, station plaza, utilities, structured parking
- Funding and financing: voter approved sales tax of \$12M; expand metropolitan district; TIF’s; grant opportunities; development impact fees

Next steps

- Collaboration and consensus building: Key people/groups the city has already worked with that will continue to keep the vision going
- Planning, economic development, and engineering departments:
 - Work with multiple land owners on assembling multiple parcels (a challenge)
 - Work on economic viability, marketing and branding
 - Wayfinding and signage; ped/bike connectivity; pop-up and temporary events

Mr. Johnstone went through what staff is doing ongoing. A staff technical working group has been established that meets monthly. Progress is being made on:

- Trying to be creative about how to use the \$12M in smart ways
- Creating a list of options and refined ranking criteria
- Identifying best funding sources for infrastructure (metro district, 2E funds, TIFs, etc.)
- Talked to some outdoor employers, formed a relationship with the State’s international trade office, and had meetings with property owners
- Would like to renegotiate with RTD. Significant bus volume (17) was originally expected, but that has changed to one bus. Bus and parking areas could be repurposed. Also want to allow pop-up uses.
- Intending to go under contract on a scope of work to define the ped bridge concept
- Parks will come from privately owned properties (where the lakes are)
- Working with adjacent jurisdictions (Arvada and Jeffco) regarding grant applications for Ridge Road and 52nd
- Branding efforts are underway; same consultant that did Investing 4 the Future
- Lauren Mikulak and Joyce Manwaring will be updating the Planning Commission and Parks Commission in the next 30 days.
- The regional park with the two lakes will need a planning process and a refined vision

Discussion followed.

- Be careful about the use of the \$12M; concerned about asking voters for more money. Mr. Goff said another tax increase is not being considered, but there are TIFs and the metropolitan district. Mr. Johnstone mentioned the \$2.5M TIF limit.
- The Parks Department will pursue GOCO and Open Space grants.
- Development fees for parks will apply.
- Update on possibilities for residential on the Hance Ranch; townhomes on the northern end may be the first to happen
- RTD has asked to come give an update. They are hopeful the Federal Railroad Administration will allow testing to resume on the G Line.
- Discussion about leveraging with other funding sources and private investment; there is no real formula. Publicizing the leveraging to the public is important
- Plenty of capacity for water and sanitary services is available. The Jolly Rancher site has LOTS of water. Options for storm water is still a topic of discussion.

Mr. Goff asked for consensus on the components of the vision so staff can proceed. There was unanimous consent to approve the vision

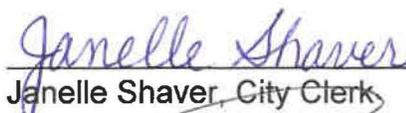
4. Elected Officials' Report(s)

Kristi Davis informed Council that Urban Renewal has a meeting tomorrow.

Genevieve Wooden reported the open house this Wednesday for Martensen's dedication is from 3:30-5:00. A program is at 3:45. She noted that some of the broken windows at Martensen are for training purposes. ~ She reminded everyone who ever attended Everitt Middle School that the open house is May 10 from 4:30 – 8:00pm.

ADJOURNMENT

The Study Session adjourned at 9:23 p.m.



Janelle Shaver, City Clerk

APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL May 8, 2017



George Pond, Mayor Pro Tem