

February 20, 2019

Congress Park Neighbors, Inc. Meeting Minutes

Attendance: Maggie Price, Andrew Tobias, Karen Miller, Tom Conis, Bob Roark, Avery Lundy, **Andrewlee** Romero, Myles Tangalin, Wendy Moraski, Dianne Thiel, Stephen Eppler, Victoria Eppler, Judith Spiegel, Uriel Remm, Dom Barrerra, Wayne New, Pam Logan, Kevin Matthews, David Scudamore, Gary Michael, Chris Rork, Peter Horsch, Roger Pierce, Tony Smith, Joe Wood, Victor Rubio **Rievu**, Eleni Sarris, Rodney Allen, Tony Smith

*Name unclear on sign in sheet

Prior to the public meeting the board members met for a brief discussion to approve the previous meeting minutes and to review recent CPN correspondence,

Wayne New, Councilman District 10, followed up on recent CPN Board communications regarding the planned closure of Congress Park pool for summer 2019. Councilman New described his interaction with Parks and Recreation. He learned that, because of the planned renovation in 2020, no funds had been budgeted. Councilman New offered to pay the \$20,000 out of his District 10 funds required to keep the pool open. Denver Parks and Recreation agreed. Councilman New then sent out an email blast to constituents announcing the good news. Shortly afterwards, Mayor Hancock called to let Councilman New know that he had intervened with Denver Park and Recreation and that the budget for the Congress Park Pool had been restored and that the city would be paying to keep the pool open this summer.

The Congress Park Neighbors board members thanked Councilman New for his efforts in keeping the pool open.

Public Meeting called to order.

Invited Speakers:

Penfield Tate III - Denver Mayoral Candidate.

Candidate Tate began by reviewing his political background including his experiences under Mayor Pena and Governor Romer. Currently, he works as a lawyer to help governments borrow money to finance public projects such as schools.

He is running as a candidate for mayor because he believes that Denver needs a reset, with new leadership and a change in direction.

Tate mentioned similarities between Congress Park Neighborhood and Park Hill, where he lives. He feels that Denver is out of balance as a community because we've been over-developed and developed in a way that is not harmonious, compatible, and architecturally appropriate for the neighborhood. Without requiring any affordable housing be built, this has resulted in development with escalating housing prices and ultimately forced residents out of their neighborhood by pricing them out as buyers or renters.

He described a recent Westword Magazine article that ranked Denver as the most difficult environment for a Millennial to settle in because housing was so expensive relative to wages, and that 85% of Millennials moving to Denver would be unable to save enough for a down payment in their first 20 years of work experience.

Tate says that the Hancock administration has not listened to the voices of the community and consequently has been unresponsive to the needs of the community at a local level. He mentioned poor communication with Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs) and then disregarding their input when it was received.

Tate thought that growth was going to occur, and that local neighborhood input was needed early in the development process so that more thoughtful development occurred rather than the current situation where the neighborhood is forced to react to the developer's plans.

Tate described how, when he worked under Mayor Pena they incorporated the RNOs into the city governance and development process, officials representing Denver in the development process and, if someone wanted a building permit, the RNOs were notified immediately. He also described how City and County representatives in negotiations with developers were required to serve as an honest broker for the neighborhood's and in discussions with the developers and the RNO's.

He stated that, if he was elected, CPN and other RNO's, would have a 'seat at the table' concerning development plans so that it reflected local neighborhood concerns and promoted responsible growth to preserve our neighborhood's character.

Tate called the current homeless situation in Denver a 'civic embarrassment' and a health and safety issue which endangers individuals and negatively impacts the Denver community. . He has been meeting with multiple people and organizations about how to best address this problem. If Tate becomes mayor, he promises to use his first 100 days to implement a plan so that all homeless individuals are housed before the onset of winter. Possibilities include additional shelters, small homes, encampments, etc. He was vague about specifics.

Tate thinks that a simple solution does not exist and that specific programs need to be developed and implemented to address the needs of different subsets of the homeless population. For example, the needs of employed construction workers who slept in their cars due to lack of affordable housing were different than those of the chronically homeless.

He thinks that Denver needs a Department of Transportation to address issues that make it so hard to get around Denver vs the Denver Region (RTD) which is more focused on suburban communities.. Tate supports regional transit and says it helps bring persons in and out from the suburbs but does little to help people get around in the city. He thinks that Denver needs a transit system that meets the needs of local residents. He mentioned that we can't change the number of streets so we need to change the way that they are used and mentioned one-way streets and changing light timing as potential solutions to reduce the amount of time spent in cars and the personal and environmental consequences.

Tate supports changing to electric vehicles by 2030 but also feels that this is the West not London. The two areas have developed differently. There is no current substitute for cars in a western city with persons traveling long distances to do business in central Denver. We still need have sufficient parking if we want a vibrant downtown. Tate was not certain that bike lanes were worth the investment and increased traffic congestion because the current lanes appear underutilized.. He described changing public behavior as wishful thinking on the part of public officials. He feels that it is important to make neighborhoods walk able to meet local needs.

Tate thought that Denver's problems need to be addressed now because we are in a favorable business cycle. It is much easier to address these issues when things are going well so that Denver is able to weather downturns in the business cycle when dollars are tight.

Debbie Ortega - Candidate Councilwoman At-Large.

She is one of the mayor's 3 co-chairs on the upcoming 2020 census. Some of it will be able to be completed on line because there are only 8 questions unlike the 2017 census which was sent out to a random segment of the US population.

Councilwoman Ortega expressed concern about fear mongering related to the census especially if the Supreme Court upholds right to ask a citizenship question(s). She said that many might be afraid to answer

this question or participate in the census because it could cause immigration problems for them. Ms. Ortega stressed that only aggregated data, stripped of identifying information, would be available any non-Census entities such as police, immigration enforcement, and that census participation could not result in deportation..

She further emphasized the importance of getting a complete count of the Denver population because the population and demographic data determines Federal funding and that currently the city receives about \$1500 per person in return to provide services like transportation.

An undercount could affect the ability of local government to provide services and whether or not Colorado receives another congressional seat. Councilwoman Ortega said that she was concerned that, if the citizenship question was included in the census questions, the non-citizens count could be subtracted from the total tally in cities that have large numbers of undocumented people "So we will wait and see if our Supreme Court does the right thing... (and disallows the citizenship question)."

Councilwoman Ortega said that she would make herself available to answer questions and address concerns. She requested that anyone interested in being involved with the census to please give her their contact information and she would put them in touch with the appropriate subcommittee.

She passed out copies of her end of the year new letter that described her 2019 office's accomplishments. This included working with Councilman New to pass an ordinance that ensures that women and minority small businesses that do work in the city were fully paid and not forced to accept less than what was bid for their services.

Councilwoman Ortega mentioned her efforts to address unemployment and promote a livable wage. She mentioned the worknow.org website for persons interested in the construction trades. It was created by CDOT in connection with the VP-I-70 Project and Denver plans to use it for the National Western project and other construction projects funded by the recent bond issue. The goal is to fund apprenticeships so that people learn a trade, earn a livable wage and long term future career path.

She is concerned about traffic and development in Denver and stated that Denver has more than 500 acres of land along the I-25 corridor that is being slated for redevelopment and that it is important to for Denver to "get this right. She described how since the Zoning Changes made in 2010 and the growth of the planning department, that Denver City Council members no longer get detailed information about parking spaces, traffic studies, the number of planned units in a development, square footage of commercial developments, etc. and that she has been pushing the Denver Planning Department to release this information so that the planned development does not make the current traffic and congestion worse.

Councilman Paul Lopez - Candidate Clerk and Recorder

For the past 12 years Councilman Lopez has represented District 3 on the west side of Denver where he was born and raised. He said that he grew up poor, went to public high school and graduated from the University of Colorado. Before becoming a councilman, he worked at a variety of jobs and that people did not know him well until he ran for City Council. To get elected, he organized his district and has kept up his organizing efforts because the precincts that he represents traditionally have low voter turnout. He is running for Clerk and Recorder because he is term limited after serving for 12 years on city council.

In his heart Councilman Lopez considers himself to be a community organizer. He started knocking on doors at age 13. His ongoing goal is to work to improve voter turnout in underrepresented precincts. He feels that greater effort needs to be made to get the disabled, blind, minorities and other disadvantaged persons to turn out and vote so that they have an equal voice in governing the city, state and nationally.

As Clerk and Recorder, he wants to explore different ways to vote so that the needs of the visually impaired can vote independently. He thinks that there should be a larger number of vote drop-off sites so that it is more convenient to vote.

Councilman Lopez thinks that the records should be digitized so that they are electronically available to improve access. This includes property records, marriage records, and city contracts. He mentioned the role of the Clerk and Recorder as the public trustee as a neutral party in the foreclosure process so that constituents are well served in the auction process.

Diane Thiel - Pro Initiative 300 - "The Right to Survive"

She began, "It could happen to you. Based on Federal Reserve and other sources it is estimated that 39-60% of people don't have \$500 saved for emergency expenses and are at risk for becoming homeless."

In 2012 City and County of Denver / Mayor Hancock passed the Denver Unauthorized Camping Ban. This ordinance prohibits use of anything except a person's clothes for protection from the elements including blankets, tarps, sleeping bags, tents, etc. This stated that this ordinance criminalized being homeless.

This resulted in more than 4647 contacts with police for violating the camping ban. Very few were arrested. These people were forced to pack up and move along to somewhere else. We call it, Whack-a-Mole Enforcement" because there is no legal place for these persons to move to. No place that they can shelter, They are forced to keep moving. The result is many sleepless nights with adverse health consequences, lost and confiscated belongings, being separated from family and friends, and increased risks of rape and assault.

Denver has an acute shortage of housing for homeless and very low income people. The 'Housing First' approach has been shown to work to get folks who are homeless back on their feet. Denver has not devoted sufficient funds to housing the homeless. Because of this more than 600 persons are sleep homeless each night.

According to Ms. Thiel, more than 60% of homeless persons have jobs. But, at minimum wage, according to HUD, it takes more than 107 hours of work to afford a 1 bedroom apartment in Denver. She states that shelters are not healthy, safe, or a viable option for many.

"The Right to Survive is not a solution for homelessness; it is a right to exist with dignity in our city. It will just help people survive until such a time that Denver builds housing" for them all.

"It will codify basic human rights; the right to take shelter, the right to rest, the right to receive food, the right to sleep in your own car and the right to be safe and secure for your person and belongings in public spaces."

The Right to Survive repeals laws which infringe upon these rights such as the Unauthorized Camping Ban.

Ms. Thiel mentioned that some jurisdictions, such as San Diego, had found laws such as Denver's Unauthorized Camping Ban to be unconstitutional on judicial review. She said that San Diego is stopped enforcing an ordinance that prohibited persons from sleeping in cars. Ms. Thiel said that this was evidence that criminalizing homelessness was "the wrong way to go."

She states that many of the groups opposing Initiative 300 are the same ones that caused the problem in the first place such as landlords who evict tenants and raise rents, developers, realtors, and the city and its lobbyists such as CRL. She did not mention the multiple homeless care providers that also oppose Initiative 300.

Dom Barrerra - Against Initiative 300 - "The Right to Survive"

He states that he was homeless when he was growing up and as a teenager. He agreed that affordable housing was a problem

He stated that Initiative 300 does a lot more than overturn the Denver Unauthorized Camping Ban. It authorizes camping in all of the parks including mountain parks, sidewalks, RTD stops, etc.

It also potentially criminalizes contacts between law enforcement and first responders who make contact with the homeless and violate their "right to be left alone." He was concerned that this would affect police conduct.

He described how he was often scared when, as a child, he had to sleep in a car because it was not safe. He thought that the proposed initiative would make it more difficult for police to provide a safe and secure environment for homeless individuals and the general population.

Initiative 300 does not provide any solution for the homeless to improve their situation. The language is very broad. It does not describe examples of what is the desired outcome. It does not provide for any social services to the homeless and makes it more difficult to provide services to them.

Yes, there is a lot that needs to be done to serve the homeless population but, Initiative 300 does not solve their problems or create a safe place for them to sleep or stay..

Congress Park Neighbors Committee updates, Denveright and group discussion.

Congress Park Pool. David Scudamore was thanked for his help on this issue. Councilman Wayne New described how he worked to keep the pool open (see above).

Safety Committee - Myles Tangalin. They have been working on having a "pop up" speed enforcement surprise with Denver police/traffic control.

Myles also described working with Councilman New (provided funding) to address traffic within Congress Park. A traffic consultant was hired to look at vehicle flows on 14th, 13th, 8th, and 6th avenues as they pass through Congress Park. This analysis should be available soon and will be made available to members to obtain input regarding traffic and creating safer streets. This program should conclude in the next few months.

A question was asked about whether there was opposition from the 7th Ave wing of Congress Park Neighbors and their desire to limit any through traffic on 7th Avenue. This group wanted to make 7th Ave. safer for pedestrians even if traffic flows through other areas of Congress Park increased. This remains a hot topic of discussion between these groups. They are working with the city to address the issues and to maintain communication.

Crime Committee - Stephen Eppler. The 2018 Crime Data still not available from Denver Police.

However, based upon other data sources, there has been a significant increase in burglaries since the first of the year. This increase is split 50:50 between forced and unforced entry. Most of the burglaries occur between Colfax and 13th Ave. This now accounts for 38% of all crimes in Congress Park. Theft from Auto and Car Theft have not changed.

Prevention strategies were discussed. Police state that entry often effected via windows and doors which are not easily visible. Recommended appropriate lighting and advised keeping bushes trimmed back. Eliminate hiding places.

An audience member described how thieves can break into autos using electronic signals based on the vehicle VIN which is visible through the driver's side windshield.

Historic Preservation Committee - Victoria Eppler Eleni Sarris, and Rodney Allen. There has not been much movement within the Landmark Ordinance that is under revision. Once this is complete, it needs to be presented to City Council for approval. Congress Park representatives are trying to make it easier to obtain Landmark Designation. Progress is slow and delayed for 2-3 months and several more months will be needed.

Recently "Cultural Significance" was been added to the list of criteria to be considered as part of historic designation..

There were no new details regarding the Park Hill Conservation Overlay. This project represents an evolution of an initial regional historic designation neighborhood plan merging with an adjacent area pursuing a conservation overlay. Their goal is to form a larger conservation overlay area within Park Hill neighborhood to restrain the unrestrained development which has negatively affected other Denver neighborhoods.

There was discussion about the poor understanding and confusion that many people have regarding Conservation Overlay and Historic Designation. There was a brief discussion about the differences.

The threat that predatory investors such as, "We Buy Ugly Houses," pose to unsophisticated, unwary elderly residents of Congress Park was mentioned. When houses are purchased at below market value, not only are the existing owners taken advantage of, but, that this can also permit a developer to replace existing residences with new construction that does not match the architectural context of the neighborhood creating increased density and additional parking problems. It was suggested that members educate their neighbors about current property values and suggest that they obtain appropriate appraisals and real estate advice so that this did not occur.

Redevelopment was discussed next. There was some discussion about nuances of single and multi-family zoning in different parts of CP and how developers who plan to scrape and build generally pay 25-35% less than other buyers.

The changing zoning environment for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) was also discussed briefly including the current status in the zoning code and ADUs could be modified as part of a conservation overlay. The role of a conservation overlay in guiding redevelopment architectural style to maintain the scale and context of the neighborhood was described and discussed at length including the ability of this type of zoning to prohibit inappropriate styles such as slot homes.

Currently, Historic Denver/Discover Denver is conducting a housing inventory of Congress Park. They started on the W side and are working their way E and are on about St. Paul. They take photos and make remarks about each property. There is a meeting on Saturday, 3/15/19 from 1-4 PM at the church on Detroit to present the data they have collected so far. If you have historic pictures or information on your house contact Beth Glandon, Director of the Discover Denver citywide building survey project (303-534-5288) so that your information can be incorporated into the Discover Denver data set.

Parks and Recreation is collaborating with the Museum of Nature and Sciences to redevelop the small playground to the W of the museum with the goal of integrating it with the museum's educational objectives. It is unclear how this will relate to and affect the DeBoer Waterway on the S of the museum. It is not clear where the money for this project is coming from. Parks and Recreation is seeking community input next Saturday from 9-11 AM (fliers were handed out and suggestions for contacting specific individuals at Parks and Recreation were made).

INC Report - Maggie Price. The role of Inter Neighborhood Cooperation (INC) as an umbrella organization of Registered Neighborhood Organizations (RNOs) was discussed. Congress Park is one of almost 100 RNOs that are represented through INC.

The INC resolution to postpone consideration of Denveright until after the 5/7/19 Mayor and City Council elections was passed by 80% of members. The resolution's goal was to prevent lame duck political incumbents from rushing Denveright through the Denver City Council approval process.

The role of INC in promoting Denver electoral candidate public presentations and debates and broadcasting them over channel 8 was mentioned. Please attend and vote. The election for Denver Mayor and City Council is May 7, 2019.

Green Team Report - Maggie Price. They are reorganizing. They are promoting several workshops on landscaping, gardening and low water use. The details are available on the website.

Denveright - the recent project planning presentation was discussed including how it will form the basis for the next Congress Park Neighborhood Plan for the next 20 years. The importance of resident participation was stressed. People can participate on-line "as if you were at the meeting."

Councilman Wayne New stated that neighborhood comments would be incorporated into a draft that would be subject to comment and review by neighborhood organizations and members of the public. He estimated that the entire process would take until the fall and that there would be ample opportunity for input and comments. He said that the Council had decided that they would not approve it until the plan had received neighborhood consensus and approval.

Maggie Price commented that many of the same comments were being made currently that were part of the existing neighborhood plan and that the current plan was still relevant. She said that the Congress Park Neighborhood plan was the product of a huge amount of local input and 15 months of work and that the current planning process could not hope to duplicate it because the entire strategy was more removed from direct neighborhood input.

Their approach is different. In the Denveright planning process Congress Park is only one of six neighborhoods within the planning area. The current plan focused on Congress Park exclusively and was approved by Council.

Maggie commented that she was disappointed that when she spoke with the various planners at the meeting that they seemed to be unaware of the existing Congress Park Neighborhood Plan. The issues and proposed solutions are similar.

Comments were made that the attitude of many City Planning Department employees seemed to be that they knew what was best for the neighborhood and somewhat arrogant and condescending. Others stated that they had observed similar behavior by city employees at other times and in other venues.

Councilman New said that he was an advocate for the Congress Park and that he would assist in the neighborhood planning process. He promised not to allow a Council vote unless there was neighborhood consensus.

The importance of moving forward on developing a conservation overlay was stressed by several members. They thought that this was the only way to control the type of development and that the Denveright planning process offered no protection from developers who could continue to build whatever they wanted regardless of the neighborhood architectural context and that previously the neighborhood plan had offered protection from this type of development.

Councilman New said that it was important to make sure that the intent of the neighborhood plan and the planned zoning needed to be closely examined to ensure there was no conflict. He briefly mentioned the recent legal difficulties that the city had when redevelopment conflicted with existing neighborhood plans. Councilman New said that zoning was key in assessing whether or not neighborhood interests were aligned with development plans.

Stability vs change was discussed next. The loss of language that spoke to "neighborhood stability" in current city planning was mentioned. Denveright has little regard for retaining the character of a neighborhood. The concern that "newer does not mean better" was expressed and that Congress Park residents like their neighborhoods, live here a reason and want to maintain the neighborhood context.

There was consensus that current city planners generally appeared to disregard this perspective. Their planning process began by aggregating 6 neighborhoods. By its very nature, this blurs the distinctions between neighborhoods, diminishing them in the process.

Concern was expressed that neighborhood stability is not part of the Denveright plan. This creates an environment where it appears as if "everything is up for grabs" with little consideration for the residents and existing neighborhood context. There was consensus that Congress Park's neighborhood integrity needed to be preserved in the Denveright planning process.

Councilman New commented that for some planning purposes, such as transportation, aggregating made sense. He opined that Congress Park could be able to preserve its character in the current Denveright planning process.

Interest was expressed for additional meetings to increase neighborhood engagement in the Denveright planning process.

Councilman New and Councilwoman Ortega discussed use of the special revenue funds created by November's past election. The authorized funds are being collected. A planning committee is being created. More information to come.

A request was made for volunteers to assist with the Penfield Tate campaign for mayor.

8:45 PM Meeting adjourned.