

WeCAN General Membership Meeting

Minutes

April 14, 2015

Prepared by Leah Rounds

Agenda

- 6:00: Call to Order & Announcements
 - Officer Gomez
 - Denver Digs Tree Planting on the 18th
 - Colfax Elementary Carnival May 1st-\$10 pp for unlim. rides, food, games
 - Diana Dietvorst-Speaking about West Colfax Clean Up Days
- 6:10: City Council Candidate Forum-Sponsored by WeCAN and West Colfax Business Improvement District*

*If you have questions you would like the candidates to specifically address, please write them on an index card and turn into Nadia before the forum begins. After the candidates answer 4 pre-selected questions, we will draw questions from the audience at random. We will ask as many as time permits.

Minutes

Call to order at 6:05pm by Co-President Nadia Patrick

Announcements

- WeCAN Clean-Up Day is May 16th, in partnership with ECM and Confluence Ministries. The clean-up will focus on residential, outdoor projects. Contact Diana or sign-up on the volunteer sheet on tables to participate. Need a count of those interested so we can decide how many projects can be done. We will also be partnering with the Parks District to clean up the gulch

Officer Gomez, DPD District 1's Community Resource Officer

- Reminder to keep garages locked and secure, and not leave anything in your car. Incidence of garage break-ins and theft from cars always rise in the summer, and it is the biggest issue occurring in the neighborhood.
- ID Packets for kids – reviews safety information with kids, and has a place to collect fingerprints and a DNA sample from your child to submit to DPD for a safety record.
- Q&A
 - There is a lot of information on Nextdoor posted about criminal activity in the neighborhood. Nextdoor is a good resource, but be wary of all the postings, it can make you paranoid reading about all the incidences in the neighborhood.
 - Story from a member – She has a tenet at 12th and Perry whose car was burglarized, a few days later Comcast arrived to fix something, he had an odd story so the tenet took his information, the phone number provided was false. Gomez – Any public utility, Comcast, etc. do not let in unless you called them for a work order. Anyone who calls and asks for personal or financial information, never give them your information. If it seems legitimate, call the company back at the number you have for them
 - Security companies – people selling alarms door-to-door aren't always legitimate, always research a company first

Announcements Continued

- This Saturday, April 18th, WeCAN is partnering with Denver Digs Trees and will be planting trees in the neighborhood. See Josh if you would like to participate
- Colfax Elementary is having a carnival at the school, May 1st. \$10/person gets you unlimited rides and games
- Earthlinks is hosting an Art Sale and wine and cheese tasting on April 23, 4-6pm. Also hosting a Mother's Day plant and garden sale on May 9. Earthlinks was recently nominated as a Denver Hands-Up Project, and to get the \$5,500 grant they need to get the most 'likes' on their facebook page.

Candidate Forum

Candidate Introductions

Councilman Paul Lopez, District 3 – Born and raised in this part of Denver. Represents Barnum, Westwood, Villa Park, and 5 others. Ran in 2007, was re-elected in 2011, and now asking for your vote for a final term. Was a former community and labor organizer.

Councilwoman Susan Shepherd, District 1 – Been the District 1 rep for the past 4 years. Previous labor organizer. Live in the NW neighborhood. Has enjoyed working with this community to build stronger bike-ability and walkability, bring affordable housing, and business development

Rafael Espinoza, District 1 candidate – Lives in the Jefferson Park neighborhood. Was asked by the community to run. Has been a community advocate for the last 16 years, focusing on redevelopment and affordable housing

Rules for Candidate Forum

There are 4 questions submitted by WeCAN and the BID, and then questions submitted by attendees will be picked at random until time runs out. Candidates have 2 minutes to respond, and any follow-up questions will come from Dan Shah, BID President and referee for the forum. Dan Shah also has written responses from at-large candidate, Robin Kniech, available.

Q&A – 4 questions provided by the BID

1. What is your vision for West Colfax (WC)? Do you see it as a destination and if so how would you support that?

- Espinoza- Don't see WC as a destination. Want to support and focus on pedestrian infrastructure. There are many plans in place for WC, but nothing has happened from any of them. Projects coming in don't support growth.
- Shepherd- It is absolutely a destination. WC is rising, due to all the hard work of the neighbors. The light rail has come to WC, there have been 60+ meeting regarding St. Anthony's, increased connectivity, working with the Jewish community on safety issues, supporting the urban renewal area at St. Anthony's, community gardens at Nettie Moore. There are great partnerships in place and going into the future.
- Lopez- Yes it's a destination, it can't just be a thoroughfare. Have to have some restaurants and other destinations, so people can live and shop in the neighborhood. Want investment to come to our side of town. There are more liquor stores than grocery stores. WC needs to be a destination. Don't want to keep spending money in Edgewater and Lakewood.

2. Redevelopment/ neighborhood change. What is your take on the changes going on as a result of development in your district and how do you see that being guided by adopted neighborhood plans? When do you think increasing zoning and density are appropriate?

- Shepherd – Blue Print Denver called for this to be an area of change, and this is accomplished through density. WC has the new light-rail line, the 16 bus, and a number of increasing transportation options. 22% of people in this neighborhood do not own a car and rely on these alternate forms of transportation. It is important to have mixed income housing in WC. There have been two up-zonings in her time on council. The WC Plan did call for 800-1200 units. Transportation needs to be addressed; bike-ability, walkability, alternative transportation modes.
- Lopez – The Neighborhood Plans in District 3 haven't been updated in a long time. The WC corridor needs to go hand in hand with transportation. Main Street zoning along Colfax goes along with this. Denver is growing, and you have to concentrate on smart planning, and pushing density in appropriate place.

- Espinoza – WC has a modern plan in place and want to put it into action. Increasing density is appropriate, but it is how it is done to reach the best possible outcome for the future. Need to ensure projects coming in fit the vision of the WC Plan. There is no affordable housing in the seven block redevelopment of St. Anthony’s, they are off-setting it only by 120 units at Colfax and Perry. The retail jobs coming in won’t support people enough to also live here.
3. Funding. How would you support efforts to secure funding to improve support business and neighborhood’s efforts to be more sustainable and commercial viable (such as through the proposed co-op and theater)?
- Lopez- Used to rely on grants. Now need to leverage it with organizations, such as “Trust for Public Lands.” Businesses want to locate here, but the buildings require a lot of clean-up, abatement, etc., and a Mom & Pop type business can’t afford to do those renovations. Need partners to give these Mom & Pops opportunities. There has to be an incentive to move here.
 - Espinoza- Alamo Drafthouse will pay \$12/hour, if the site hadn’t received TIF money it wouldn’t have been able to complete. Money should be used to move the community forward, not just towards business interests.
 - Shepherd- Many WC businesses have participated in the Denver Energy Challenge, accessing services to become more energy efficient. A congratulations to WC on earning a Gold Sustainable Neighborhood Network award in 2014. Need businesses we can walk, bike, short bus ride to, not just retail, but health care services, etc. We will all be driving less, supporting local businesses, and supporting local schools through tax dollars.
4. Pedestrian/bicycle environment. A numbers of studies are showing that improving pedestrian and bike access increases retail sales and numbers of customers of neighborhood-based businesses.
- a) What role does pedestrian and bicycle access and infrastructure play in supporting neighborhood-based businesses?

- Espinoza- WC uses the bus system. The neighborhood needs sidewalk improvements, and bike lanes are in good shape. There are many plans in place, and we need to work towards a common goal.
- Shepherd- Put quality walk and bike infrastructure in, improve safety and accessibility. Nowhere to build more parking, need protected bike access, better bike infrastructure, need a North-South route as well. There is no comprehensive sidewalk policy in place for the city. Have asked the Mayor to study the issue, right now it is up to property owners to do any repairs.
- Lopez – Need more sidewalks, many homeowners can't afford to make repairs because the city makes them go through a licensed city contractor. This area should be bike-able, but bike access stops at the viaduct. Want to be able to ride in a safely lit area. Colfax needs to be redesigned to support pedestrians.

b) What is the role of the City in paying for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in neighborhood commercial districts?

- Shepherd- There are no city sidewalk policies, I think that should be the responsibility of the city. There has been lots of support in council on this issue. For bike infrastructure, the budget is not consistent. Have to advocate hard for funds from the Mayor.
- Lopez- Denver needs to look at WC and put money here. The state of the sidewalks shows the lack of investment here.
- Espinoza- The city would simplify the process. There is 50 million available for the city to repair sidewalks. Sheridan needs a sidewalk.
- Shepherd- In the recession, city services were cut. Need a lot more police officers, public housing, many departments are understaffed.
- Lopez- WC now has two votes in District 1 and 3
- Espinoza- There may be seven new council people coming in, they can override and Mayor veto

- c) Think of a street in Denver you would prefer to walk or bike along and another in Denver where you would never choose to be a pedestrian or bicyclist. What makes them different pedestrian experiences and how could you make the second more like the first—or would you want to?
- Lopez- Like walking along Federal, all the good food there. Do not like walking in the shadows of the viaduct. The Colfax viaduct needs a redesign, it will cost a lot, and it needs to connect not just cars, but pedestrians, bikes, a street car, and eliminate the 16 bus.
 - Espinoza- Bring the bike traffic down 13th and through Auraria. Walking along 17th is pleasant, like biking on the path from here to Golden. Never like walking on Colorado Blvd, especially from Colfax to Yale.
 - Shepherd- Like to walk in the Tennyson Business district, there is a mix rich of businesses there. Like walking along 46th with the large trees. Do not like walking on the Colfax viaduct, or at Federal and Colfax to get to the light-rail station.

Councilwoman Debbie Ortega, At-Large, joined the forum and gave an introduction.

Ortega- Served on council previously, was term-limited, then came back. It is important to have people who know how the city works. Committed to the city. In regards to the previous question- Never like walking on Colorado Blvd., it's very heavily congested. Like walking in the LoHi neighborhood. Like to bike along the trail system, Denver has a great trail system in place.

- d) Please describe your position on the proposal from the Affordable Fares Task Force, and how that could support improves amenities in this transit-rich neighborhood.
- Ortega- There is a proposed fare increase at RTD, public meetings are currently being held. Concern is the low-income people. Need to look at a tiered fare system. Some low-income people are plugged in with services that provide an RTD pass, not all.

- Espinoza- Not a fan of the RTD structure. Want a simplified fare system, which would help improve ridership. RTD can't continue with the budget the way it is.
- Shepherd- They'll be getting rid of the light-rail zone system. Have to raise fares to cover costs. Concern over the cost to the airport, for the people that work there too.
- Lopez- Anytime there was a fight for changes on this issue, there wasn't unity in city council. Need to be more efficient in where to plan stops. Fares are not being checked on the light-rail.

Q&A – questions submitted on cards by attendees and pulled at random as time allows. One minute is given to each candidate to reply

1. I'm not going to characterize the aesthetics of the many housing units going up around North Denver. I would like to know how you would describe the various new housing going up, particularly along 17th Street.
 - Espinoza- It is concerning, the longevity of these structures, they can become a liability to the home-owner. The city should do their part to address the quality and durability of structures
 - Shepherd- 2010 zoning plan called for increased density. On 17th they do seem large in comparison to the surrounding homes. Most are not putting in landscaping. Would like to see a requirement in place on landscaping.
 - Lopez- Need an overlay district. What's being built doesn't match the neighborhood. The real problem is the discrimination against low-income housing.
 - Ortega- Served on the board of Del Norte, who recently built a high quality building at Irving. Need to adopt a housing plan, have standards in place, but need to provide the funding for it. Need to create housing for working families.

Follow-up Question: RTD has an Affordable Fare Task Force, where people 150% below the poverty line could get a RTD pass at a 50% discount. Would you be in support of this?

- Shepherd- Would support this.

- Lopez- Yes, would support. Need mechanisms for people to get the help they need. The right fare price, but also need to increase ridership.
- Ortega- System in other cities you put money on a ticket and often times don't use some of the fare, that is how they help fund their systems. Low-income people need more assistance.
- Espinoza- Yes, agree on a lower price, a simplified fare structure. On the issue of the over-lay district, I would advocate for one in WC.

2. To Councilwoman Shepherd- Your closing remarks at the City Council meeting regarding our obligations to raise the bar regarding neighborhood quality, amenities and particularly employment opportunities for the local resident was very powerful. Could you please review those guiding principles for us?

- Shepherd- Along the WC corridor rezoning has been very important, it is providing a catalytic opportunity for the neighborhood. It's not just the number of units, it's the vision for the whole corridor, with mixed use and great connectivity
- Espinoza- Lost medical jobs to Lakewood, and replacing them with ground floor retail jobs that won't pay as well. It was not a one for one deal. Displacing good careers with service jobs. Should be putting in jobs that are enduring.

3. Some issues are of citywide concern and financial consequences. Where do you stand on the plans to trench and expand I-70 East? Since 83% of those commenting on the environmental impact study are in favor of studying a reroute/boulevard alternative, would you demand that CDOT do this?

- Lopez- Yes, I would demand it of CDOT. Went door to door in 2003 to get the environmental impact study done. Denver has a recommendation, but it is a state project.
- Ortega- Have been deeply involved in this project. City Council was asked to support the plan that CDOT brought before the environmental impact study was done, showing the impact to these neighborhoods.

- Espinoza- Agrees with the council members. This is a no brainer, the families need to be a part of the process. No to widening I-70
 - Shepherd- Voted no on the proclamation. It takes 9 to have a Mayoral veto. An opportunity with new council members to push harder for the reroute. There is also an airport city development in place that will increase traffic.
4. Why is there no affordable housing on site at the St. Anthony's site? On/In the development?
- Espinoza- Went to the committee hearing, there is no intent to put affordable housing in. There will be 120 units outside of the development area. At the public hearings for the 12 story rezoning there were no discussions on affordable housing.
 - Shepherd- the 120 units at Colfax and Perry will be for 30% AMI, for-rent. There is a huge need for this housing along the corridor. There will likely be affordable for-sale housing in block 4.
 - Lopez- Affordable rentals have been worked into the WC Plan. Why is there a fixation on this specific property? Need to focus on having affordable for-sale housing in this area. Blue collar Latinos don't have access to resources, homes loans, etc.
 - Ortega- There will be affordable rentals. The Inclusionary Housing Ordinance can only mandate affordable housing in for-sale units, not rentals. Home ownership is important in stabilizing neighborhoods. Not everyone can be a home owner, and affordable rentals are a part of this.

Two minute closing remarks from each candidate

Debbie Ortega – Asking for your support, it's been a privilege to serve. I-70 is one city issue that we have leverage on, the land underneath I-70 would need to be sold to CDOT.

Rafael Espinoza – An architect and developer for affordable housing projects, trying to target low-income families. Building 220 units of affordable housing in Stapleton right

now. Was asked to run by the community. Will negotiate, will fight, and be the voice for the community.

Susan Shepherd- It's been a privilege to serve and collaborate with the neighborhood. Been good to work with the community of the library, businesses coming in. Done great work and want to continue.

Paul Lopez- Proud to represent WC. Regardless of your council line, the West side has been underrepresented. Have defeated liquor license, two new parks, paved streets, replaced dumpsters with barrels.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm

Respectfully submitted,

Leah Rounds

Secretary

West Colfax Association of Neighbors (WeCAN)