

Minutes for ECNA Nov. 19, 2024 Meeting at Counterpath

6:30pm start

Minutes transcribed by ECNA Secretary Matt Ross. No claims are made for absolute accuracy, as these minutes were transcribed with the possibility of human error. Unless direct quotations are used, the reader should assume that the statements herein are paraphrased.

Intro that was read aloud by ECNA President Tim Roberts:

Land Acknowledgments

We are on the traditional territories of the Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe peoples. There is an additional land acknowledgment information page on our website - please check for more info!

General Updates from Tim Roberts, ECNA President

- The joint RNO meeting was a huge success in October, and we are so grateful for everybody's participation.
- Pointed out that East Colfax showed up massively as compared to the representative population versus the other neighborhoods that were at the joint RNO meeting. There is a great community spirit here!
- Keep in mind that we have the December meeting on the 17th, which will be our holiday party, which is a very important thing. We will email around a signup sheet so that you can volunteer to bring a dish or anything else you are able to, and ECNA will purchase main dishes and work on getting entertainment for the meeting. This will be a nice way to do something really low stress.
- At the same time, we will have an election at the December meeting.
- We will be looking at the bylaws and making sure that the board and the leadership team are as representative as possible of this neighborhood.
- Add-on from Megan Osborn: the board is fun, and it's not a huge time commitment, so please think about it, and feel free to put your name in the ring to join.
- Somebody sent \$500 to the emergency fund - this was a very generous act that we really appreciate.
- There was a town hall that was meant to be hosted by our councilwoman Shontel Lewis, but she had her appendix out, so it had to be canceled indefinitely.
- On the table is a proposal that this RNO purchase a school bus via a GoFundMe. There is one that is about \$12,000 and will hold up to 32 people. We would drive it down to El Paso to pick up

additional newcomers who would like to come up to Denver. We believe we can handle this kind of thing, and we can effectively settle folks into this neighborhood.

- The bus would be parked at Counterpath, and a trip down to El Paso would cost about \$500 per trip in gasoline.

Open comments

- Nobody signed up at this time, but there are three slots available at 2 minutes per slot each month.

Terrance Roberts, intro and recent projects after his mayoral bid

- Ex-mayoral candidate, and Tim asked that he come to speak about
- Grew up in Park Hill and has an affinity for this community and a care for this community.
- The reason why I wanted to run for mayor out of 17 people was that he became a community organizer in 2004, shared an office with Major Johnston.
- Roberts and previous Mayor Hancock did not see eye to eye, and Roberts feels like he became hyper-focused on the Welton Street corridor revitalization other than housing initiatives.
- Worked in Chicago, Los Angeles, Port Au Prince
- Not one person brought up the word poverty out of all of the folks who were running for mayor, and Roberts was the only one who was willing to use it.
- Right now, Denver has around 4,000 public housing units, and they are subsidizing around another 7,000 homes.
- Prop 123 passed in 2022 for \$300,000,000 for developers. This has just been started to be released this year.
- Mayor Johnston tried to push through 2R, but Roberts was not for this.
- We have 25,000 units sitting empty right now, which were built by the same developers who are being awarded this \$300,000,000 from Pro 123.
- Roberts believes that this is becoming a developer's racket.
- Roberts is disappointed in Mayor Johnston so that he could be an advocate for public housing. Public housing is not a dirty word, but it is only "dirty" when it is done in reckless, dangerous, and / or racist ways.

- Roberts has been afraid for the direction of our city. He is happy about the approval of ADU's in zoning for folks.
- Denver is the second-most gentrified city in the country other than San Francisco. Black folks have been pushed out of Park Hill and Five Points and other historically Black neighborhoods.
- Roberts wanted to show folks that if one works hard and conducts oneself with grace, one can rise to great heights.
- Roberts believes in Land Trusts and that there are so many things that we can do other than giving developers 100's of millions of dollars that they will not use effectively.
- Think about public housing as we move into the future.
- Colfax Community Scene is a show that Roberts is producing within his production company to highlight the positive side of Colfax.
- Roberts also created another show that highlights the stories of serial killers and other crime patterns along Colfax in history.
- Did not vote for Trump and is not a Republican but believes that there is massive corruption in the Mayor's office here in Denver.
- Roberts is grateful for the City Auditor who is in charge of monitoring the city's internal mechanisms.
- Roberts is also a property inspector in residential, commercial, and government building sectors.
- Supports rent control
- Believes that we need more people to stand up against folks like Mike Johnston rather than continuing to pass laws that will funnel laws to the same eight companies, controlled by mega-rich people.
- Gas Station Media is the name of Roberts' production company which produces Denver-centric content both on crime and positive elements.

Denver City Auditor Tim O'Brien, general update

- O'Brien seconds Roberts' statements and applauds his efforts.
- Elected first in 2015, 2019, and 2023.
- The Mayor, Auditor, Clerk and Recorder, and City Council are all up for election at the same time.

- Their work is performed on behalf of everyone who cares about the city, including its residents, workers, and decision-makers
- The auditor does internal auditing, wage enforcement and education, and independent audit committee.
- Marijuana Sales Tax: in 2020, this revenue really started to grow and hit a “high point” in 2021 at around \$50.7 million. However, now it is starting to go down, as marijuana may be more available in neighboring states.
- Sales and Use Tax is the driver of the city’s general fund, which generates about \$1.7 Billion every year.
- The General Fund Balance is the remainder after all of the expenses are paid, and in 2023 this sat at around \$422.1 Million.
- 2020 was a year that this balance decreased substantially due to the pandemic.
- Denver has a AAA Bond Rating, which means that when people who buy Denver’s bonds, they know that they are backed up by serious funds.
- Denver International Airport generates a lot of revenue for the city and does not cost nearly as much to operate as it brings in.
- The 2025 Audit Plan is now available, and this audit addresses specific risks, including: performance, financial, contractual, information technology, data analytics, and regulatory
- How do they decide what to audit? Assessments in previous audit reports, input from community members and groups, risk identified in other government audits, current local events and public policy issues.
- The Auditor also attends RNO meetings and seeks consistent community feedback.
- Many significant audits have been recently completed such as those into homeless encampments, mental health services in jail systems, fair election systems, and city equity program and practices
- Denver Labor now speaks, a division of the Auditor Office.
- Denver is relatively unique in that the government has invested quite a bit of resources in combating wage theft.
- Councilwoman Lewis is a staunch advocate for workers’ rights as well.
- Denver Labor serves the entire community, including employers, workers, and the City and County of Denver.

- They work towards workforce equity, lawful wages protection, and creating an attractive market here in Denver.
- At least 30,000 people in Denver are paid less than minimum wage, which is stunningly high. This makes it hard to pay for rent, food, medical care, and transportation.
- Denver Labor recognizes that wage theft is a social problem that requires government oversight.
- In January 2023, Denver City Council passed a new ordinance for Civil Wage Theft, which will ensure that workers are not only paid the wages they were denied but also damages.
- In January of 2020, minimum wage was instituted at \$12.85 in 2020, and it was calculated to mirror inflation and the growing cost of living in Denver, coming up to \$18.29 in 2024.
- There is also a prevailing wage that ensures that workers on city projects are paid fairly per their industry standard.
- Since O'Brien has been in office, millions of dollars have been recovered for workers who had their wages stolen.
- Denver Labor also engages in active enforcement to investigate systemic issues and high-risk companies or industries.
- 751 cases were closed this past reporting period compared to 586 in 2023.
- Recently got Subpoena power for wage investigations, and Councilwoman Lewis co-sponsored that bill.
- Denver Labor also prioritizes education so that employees can know their rights, and employers can understand the laws and follow them more closely.
- Engage with people as much as possible so that they know that they have a resource.
- Back to Auditor O'Brien:
- Auditor's Office prioritizes Staff Development, including bringing in many CPA's, folks with advanced degrees, Certified Fraud Examiners, Certified Internal Auditors, and more
- There is a newsletter for the Auditor's Office as well, community meetings, zoom meetings, annual reports, audit plans, monthly videos, and social media
- The folks who are being taken advantage of by wage theft are largely women, BIPOC, and those who are most vulnerable.

- Who loses out on the marijuana tax revenue that is decreasing? It is meant to go to enforcement, education, and “other,” which is a gray area. The administration does not support providing additional information in the other category to allow for greater transparency.
- Megan Osborn: one of the concerns of our community is that we are not seeing the result or the attention that we have been promised by the city in terms of street safety. The clear and consistent message is that we are not receiving the promises that were put down in writing as a community. I would love to see maybe not an audit but a report of: is reality reflective of how we are all feeling?
- O’Brien: I hear what you are saying, and what I am hearing you describe is a massive project that we may not be able to achieve in a timely way that it would still be relevant by the time that it was complete. But I will take that into advisement.
- Other comment: it’s a DEI issue. In terms of compost alone, we are like 3 years out, and we do not yet have compost bins... It has become such an issue that whenever the city goes to raise money for something, we do not trust that it will be spent efficiently to do what was promised.
- Terrance Roberts: what will happen when the new President Elect comes in and cracks down on sanctuary cities such as Denver
- O’Brien: it’s an open question. Trump knows what he can get away with at this point, and the Supreme Court has said that he can get away with anything. The lineup of appointees is shocking and alarming. We are all waiting to see what happens.
- Roberts: How much money do we get from the federal government every year?
- O’Brien: we got a lot of federal dollars during the COVID era, as the federal government flooded the economy with dollars in an attempt to stop the economy from collapsing. This cause inflation as a result. On a regular basis, we get about \$800,000,000 per year in federal dollars.
- O’Brien: I have enjoyed this job so much. I was the state auditor before this, but nothing has been as satisfying as making the community that I live in a better place, so thank you.

Elevation Community Land Trust, Vice President for Real Estate, David Ogunsanya, details of activity in East Colfax

- Goal of Elevation is Affordable Homeownership in Colorado.
- Founded in 2017 from philanthropic funds to create a state-wide land trust that could work in many communities to help combat the affordable housing issue that is affecting much of the state.
- Elevation was created to work in multiple communities at the same time to have a wide impact.
- Ogunsanya was the first employee, came from a community land trust in Georgia. Has also done this work in Pittsburgh and D.C.
- Now in their 6th year of operation and are growing, wishing to partner with Colorado communities to create equitable opportunities for individuals and families through permanently affordable homeownership.
- They are in Denver, Aurora, Fort Collins, Boulder, Durango, and more.
- There are many affordable rentals, but there is no next step for people to take into homeownership after that.
- Their model is to create long-term affordability through the share-appreciation model, which allows for wealth-building, employing stewardship and maintenance of community ties.
- What is a CLT? It is a model that separates the land from the improvements. The land is held in trust, and the homeowner owns the improvements (AKA the physical structure) on the land. Affordability is permanent because the CLT controls the resale price.
- This model has existed since the 1960s.
- They are at over 300 homeowners after having started with homeowners in 2018.
- How to Apply: Fill out interest form, get pre-approved with an ECLT lender, finish application, and purchase home.
- elevationclt.org is their website.
- This model allows for mobility from city to city within an affordable model.
- Footprint in East Colfax: there are 50 total units. 6 are owner occupied, 7 are for sale, 26 are under construction, and 11 are rented.
- They do full lead and asbestos remediation and abatement for all homes that they purchase. They want their properties to be quality and affordable rather than feeling cheap.

- There is a ton of investment and transformation coming into East Colfax, and this place reminds Ogunsanya of a lot of neighborhoods which had a lot of disinvestment for a long time, which then experienced rapid gentrification.
- Elevation saw an opportunity to create opportunities for affordability and longterm sustainability.
- ECCC and The Fax Partnership are also working on this issue from other lenses.
- They are also doing condominium conversions to create one-bedroom condominiums at very affordable prices. 1520 Trenton is a great example of this.
- The idea is that unless someone is told their properties are affordable units, one would never know because everything is so high-quality.
- Also emphasize security via improve lighting, fencing, landscaping, walking paths, automated gates, signage, patrols, and communication
- Communication with community members has significantly reduced break-ins as well as improved rapport with concerned stakeholders who support the mission once they understand it.
- How to partner with Elevation? Include ECLT programs in resource packets, promote ECLT through newsletters, social media, and invite ECLT to resource fairs and information sessions, etc.
- Question: What happens to the equity of the home?
- When somebody buys a home from Elevation, you do not own the land. Elevation pays the taxes on the land, and in case something happens, it prevents the bank from foreclosing on one's home if one cannot pay on it.
- If someone chooses to sell their home, the appraisal difference between the original market price to the market price at the time of the sale, they keep 25% of the increase in value. They also retain 100% of equity and get 100% of the equity from the value of improvements that they made. Elevation uses the remaining 75% to help make the property affordable for the next homeowner of the property.
- Question: how do you all think about and engage with community engagement? This is a major moment for this neighborhood. What is the strategy here for community buy-in and support?
- The fact that most people in this room had not heard of us means that maybe we are not doing as much as we need to in order to create community outreach.

- Councilwoman Lewis is very diligent about properly vetting the organization and its intentions.
- Director of Communications was just hired this year for ECLT to address this very issue of community engagement and outreach.
- ECLT has their own lenders, but folks can use other lenders as well - one does not need to use the lenders of ECLT in particular. ECLT wants folks to get the best rate and the best deal possible.
- Question: Do you have any displacement prevention programs in place?
- The Stay-in-Place (SIP) program is designed to keep folks in the homes that they own and to help deal with this displacement issue. ECLT will purchase the land, hold it in trust, and then the existing tenants will have to pay less taxes because the ECLT pays taxes on the land itself. This is particularly helpful for older homeowners in Park Hill and Westwood, etc.
- This can also help with folks generating revenue to put in an ADU on their properties as well.
- Question: How is your landscaping for pollinators?
- It's not necessarily considering all of these things. They are doing xeriscaping, planting, and other things like that. It's meant for low upkeep.