

Minutes for Joint RNO & District 8 Meeting Oct. 15, 2024 Meeting at Zion Senior Center

Presentation started at 6:30pm

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.

Group enjoyed complimentary dinner and refreshments beginning at 6PM.

Northeast Park Hill Commission began the meeting / called to order.

- Introduction: we will be introducing the 4 RNOs of District 8, and then bring on a host of speakers including city planning and Councilwoman Shontel Lewis. Public question period will follow. Index cards exist on tables to get feedback and questions in writing for local RNO.
- Land Inequity Acknowledgement: As residents of Colorado, we stand upon the ancestral lands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Lakota, and Ute peoples. We recognize native peoples as the original inhabitants and stewards of this land...
- Equity Acknowledgement read as well, speaking to the lingering effect of systemic discriminatory practices and their impacts on our communities, especially communities of color.
- Description of the nature of this forum and the changes happening within District 8, specifically regarding development, housing of the unhoused, and many issues related to gentrification.
- The goal today is to collaborate towards collective goals that affect us all.

Announcement of existing RNO's within District 8

- Ann White with Montbello 2020
- Liz Faulker with Central Park United Neighbors
- Tim Roberts with the East Colfax Neighborhood Association
- Roger Cobb with the Northeast Park Hill Coalition

Ann White Executive Director of Montbello 2020

- Organized in March 2008
- Mission and vision to inform, educate, and empower the community around issues that affect the communities.
- One of the largest areas in Montbello, experiencing a ton of growth in the neighborhood reflecting issues around housing, seniors who do not have access, and attempting to work through many of the issues that exist.

- Community Planning and Development and NEST are of special note and interest for bringing monies and funds into the community to help children, seniors, and young adults who struggle with health equity, transportation, and more.
- “It feels like we are busting at the seams” from all of the growth happening in the neighborhood due to gentrification
- Invited the Mayor of Denver to come and witness the issues that are affecting their community; the Mayor has declined these requests as of now.
- Host neighborhood meetings bi-monthly at the new police department building. Space is a difficult phenomenon to procure in Montebello
- Just opened the first Senior Technology Center and have been working on this for 9 years. The ribbon cutting just occurred and was a huge community effort!

Liz Faulker from Central Park United Neighbors

- The genesis of this meeting came from RNO leaders’ discussion about ways that RNO’s can get to know more about one another’s communities.
- One of the largest hurdles was that all of the RNO’s meet on the third Tuesday of each month, and so the creation of a large, joint meeting was a creative solution to this inherent scheduling difficulty.
- Attention drawn to visual aid of a large map of District 8, delineating each of the distinct neighborhoods represented by RNO’s.
- Central Park is the large “infill, redevelopment of the old Stapleton Airport,” and it began in 2003 to be built. The RNO began in 2004 and just celebrated 20 years of existence.
- RNO’s are intended to have a channel of communication that is two-way: from the city to the people and from the people to the city.
- The goal is to distribute information from the city to the community as well as to bring to prominence the issues that community is experiencing and bringing those issues to the city government.
- Growth and development are key issues to all of the neighborhoods within District 8.
- Central Park is at 12,000 single families for sale and is almost at “full build-out.” About 32,000 residents live in the neighborhood. A number of redevelopment projects will also be occurring overtime.
- Development is front and center, and there are a number of committees within the RNO, such as the “Safe Streets Committee,” dedicated to reducing car crashes and fatalities. This committee has regular meetings with the department of transportation and infrastructure to mitigate the effects of development.

- DEI Committee is wrapping up a 4-month book club on how to make just and equitable land use decisions.
- Part of the development was meant to be affordable, and part of the goals at present is to ensure that these affordable units are built BEFORE the median area income rises to levels that render the “affordable” nature of these units moot.

Tim Roberts from East Colfax Neighborhood Association

- A collaboration occurred during the redistricting process that saw some changes to District 8 as it now stands.
- Referenced the fact that East Colfax is “new on the block” in District 8, as the Southern half of East Colfax was annexed into District 8 during this process.
- The entire neighborhood of East Colfax is now in District 8.
- East Colfax has a huge amount to say about it: if we want to talk about history. Going way back, we are mostly single family homes, and the RNO was started in 1972.
- We have dealt with a number of issues starting with Tim’s involvement in 2019, primarily looking at gentrification and corresponding involuntary displacement.
- The active focus on anti-displacement efforts was honed in on in early 2019 with the beginning of a food bank at Counterpath.
- Mention of how the food bank has been temporarily paused due to gun violence.
- The idea is not that we are “solving gentrification” but that we are at least concretely taking a bit off of people’s grocery bills.
- There has also been an “epic transformation” along East Colfax in the past several years that we should note: and that is that Rose on the Fax now exists at Valentia & Colfax, entirely for affordable units. This is a large influx of newcomers. Valor on the Fax around Trenton & Colfax is also specifically the first of its kind in the U.S. for people with traumatic brain injuries.
- We are also looking at the activity of the East Colfax Community Collective which is massively organizing in the area and facilitating affordable housing with a ton of new ideas and investments.
- The Fax is also a major player here in the non-profit space.
- The other layer is that we are able to support communities of refugees and immigrants, similar to Northwest Aurora, and this is something that everyone can be excited about.
- Hidden Brook Apartments and Hope Communities should be given a lot of credit for helping these communities make their way here in Colorado.

- ECNA is keeping an eye on development and asking for NEST to take care of communities like ours so that gentrification does not leave folks behind.

Roger Cobb with the Northeast Park Hill Coalition

- Acknowledgement of the massive effort that it took to have the redistricting occur here in District 8.
- Secured a community benefit agreement with the Park Hill Golf Course development project.
- Looking at a 600 unit affordable housing development that may be facilitated by the Urban Land Conservancy
- Naming that “we no longer have a Black neighborhood” here in Denver and reference to the history of redlining here in Denver.

Community Planning and Development Department Executive Director Anish Kumar & Sarah Showalter,
Director of Planning Services

- What is this department?
- Everything that is related to the private development side, neighborhood plans, small area plans, and largescale developments
- Zoning codes, building codes, design standards
- Looks at demolition and landmarking
- Looks to preserve the architectural integrity of a neighborhood
- From a kitchen remodel to a 100-story skyscraper
- Long-range planning (10-20 years out)
- Also coding of energy and efficiency questions
- Acknowledgement of the fact that CPD is also a partner with RNO's and neighborhoods specifically.
- Niche of CPD is doing a lot of work around land use, development, and zoning codes.
- This must also be framed within a lot of other contexts: transportation, education, commercial interests, etc.
- Naming of the need for safe biking options, walking options, and mass transit options.
- Thinking about the affordability of housing in specific neighborhoods.
- Thinking across many topics and attempting to bring them together into a coherent plan.
- A plan does not translate to specific regulations, but rather to a joint vision that is meant to be collaboratively constructed.
- Naming the need for affordable housing developers, small business development, and community partners.

- Changed the East Colfax zoning to attempt to encourage walkability on this stretch of the main street of the neighborhood.
- Spoke to the virtues of the planning process as “an important step to help the city come together and say that this is a priority for this community.”
- Naming of the “why” of this work: to attempt to translate community needs into a coherent “plan in action,” which is translated to a web page that individuals can track metrics of success over time
- Goal is to cover the entire city with neighborhood-specific plans.
- Naming of how the BRT may translate into a great deal of private investment that may displace existing businesses and residents.
- Highlighting affordable housing on the corridor as a critical element of the plan, in particular when it is located near mass transit.
- The work that is done depends upon partners within NEST, DOTI, Housing, and District 8 Council Office

NEST Director Seneca Holmes

- Neighborhood Equity Stabilization Team is what NEST stands for
- Denver Economic Development and Opportunity (DEDO) hosts NEST along with several other organizations related to economic development within the City of Denver.
- What does NEST do?
- Some sort of neighborhood office has existed since the 80s to distribute federal funds to low- and moderate- income communities.
- Post great-recession when we had a huge economic bounceback, we saw a large amount of economic change in the neighborhoods. This left a lot of people and a lot of neighborhoods behind and pushed a lot of people out.
- NEST was created in 2018 whose real undercurrent of the mission is to prevent involuntary displacement. At that time, the focus was on the “inverted L” of Denver, 10 neighborhoods in particular.
- Overtime, Denver has continued to experience displacement, and so two years ago, a comprehensive neighborhood analysis occurred resulting in the NEST Index, which is a nationally-recognized data set and methodology.
- Economic, Social, and Business criteria are the key components of the NEST Index.
- When preventing involuntary displacement, housing is “not everything,” as the cultural integrity of the neighborhood is also essential.

- Holmes spoke to the unraveling and disappearance of cultural landmarks and festivities within the Potters Highlands district in which he lived as it gentrified. He spoke to how NEST exists to mitigate the effects of gentrification through community development block grant dollars administered intentionally.
- More recently, since COVID, NEST has invested heavily in small business development and technical assistance, particularly along East Colfax and other neighborhoods across the city.
- They have become influential in working with partners in other agencies, particularly CPD, when talking about land use decisions and developers' role in addressing inequities.
- "CPD has really allowed us a seat at the table."
- Recently, NEST has developed "Community Serving Uses" policy in which a large-scale development will be asked to incorporate elements of neighborhood inequities to help mitigate some of the effects of gentrification therein.
- An example of this was the redevelopment of the Evans School in Golden Triangle.
- Many more examples of this policy in action exist with the goal of providing "at least something for the community that will... mitigate some of the larger effects of gentrification."
- NEST is looking to craft more partnerships with other city agencies, in the way that CPD has incorporated NEST into its work.

Maureen Morley from HOST

- Housing Stability Department in Denver
- Goes from those experiencing homelessness to home ownership and affordable housing as well.
- Looking to ensure that housing compliance also is in-effect.
- The Opportunity Team and Catalytic Team are very much involved in expanding the affordable housing within Denver that has mandatory affordable housing for any and all market rate properties.
- 60% AMI (Area Median Income) is the cap for all affordable housing within newly built properties. This policy is in place now, but some properties are grandfathered in and will not be adhering to it just yet.
- Working with NEST and DEDO to foster affordable housing as much as possible, also working with partner agencies for rental assistance, etc.
- HOST addresses nearly everything that has to do with housing here in Denver.

- A new prioritization process now exists: if you have lived in Denver, have children in Denver, and may be elderly or disabled, you can gain priority status for accessing affordable housing within “prioritized” developments.
- Being on this prioritized list means that folks will have first choice of housing (renting or buying) in select new developments.
- More details will come in an upcoming media blitz, but please spread the word about this prioritization process.

District 8 Councilwoman Shontel Lewis

- Approve the budget
- Work in constituent services
- Make laws, put forth ballot initiatives
- Serve as a conduit between city departments and in some ways as an interventionist for constituents within the city departments
- Acknowledged her staff as essential to her success!
- There are 13 members of council: two are at-large.
- Lewis chairs the Business Committee of City Council
- She engaged in direct community engagement to understand what matters to her constituents and to hopefully have the budget reflect these concerns directly.
- Referenced the Senior Tech Lab as an area of success and a partnership between the community and the District 8 Office.
- Deeply interested in supporting constituency’s goals and facilitating the implementation of these goals
- Montbello: there are concerns are housing for seniors and gentrification. Some of the things that are being addressed within this area are: social housing to build rent control into a city level.
- Great learning that is happening within the District 8 office to better vet developers when they come before the council, as it pertains to community needs.
- East Colfax: we have had many conversations around displacement and making sure that when we are advocating for resources to come into communities, we need to think about the people not only the infrastructure within the communities.
- East Park Hill: discussion of the Park Hill Golf Course and related zoning issues that pertain to the issues of gentrification.
- Naming of the fact that the Northeast Park Hill Plan is over 20 years old and is perhaps not responsive to the needs of the present moment.

- Discussion of accountability of existing city contracts and the effective use of tax dollars.

Public Comments

- Q: How does the City plan to support small businesses while BRT is under construction?
- A: Councilwoman Lewis: A budget amendment of an additional \$1.5 million addition has been added to the Bio fund to support small businesses during the transition.
- Q: ECCC voices the fact that businesses along East Colfax from Colorado to Yosemite are being drastically affected, and funds are not being distributed by the city until after January. Some businesses have already been driven out over these past 3 or 4 months due to this construction. These effects have been affected by the pipes being replaced, semi-trucks being parked for long periods of time, etc. Why are we waiting until January to release these funds rather than immediately distributing them? What are businesses supposed to do until then?
- A: Rep from CPD: Voices solidarity in that they utilize the bus everyday. The Bio Fund is run by DEDO, and we need to figure out what is going on and how the funds will become available.
- A: NEST: The Bio Fund may be held up within the budget process itself. We did not know how much would even be available until we had actually made our way through the budget process.
- Q: How many neighborhood inspectors are assigned to the Montbello Community?
- A: CPD: We do not assign inspectors to specific areas. The rational is that the needs of the city change on a daily basis, and we want them to be available to respond in the moment.
- A: Lewis: from a council perspective, we asked for the budget to increase funding for the number of inspectors available from the city.
- Q: I don't understand why the inspectors are set up that way because there are communities who have more issues than others. When you move inspectors around, there is a lack of responsibility and accountability for the issues at hand. Inspectors have been known to drive right by violations that are apparent to the eye. This is an equity issue that could be somewhat alleviated if we were assigned an inspector to each district so that particular concerns of the neighborhood will be addressed specifically.
- Q: Why are cases closed without being resolved? When violations are submitted, CPD is not enforcing the code, it feels like nobody is addressing continuous and longstanding issues.
- A: CPD: We will look into this issue.

- Q: What is the plan for the sidewalks in East Colfax? I was raised by the streets because of the lack of sidewalks.
- A: DOTI/BRT: We can't afford to replace all of the sidewalks up and down Colfax, but we did a study and have incorporated replacements into the scope of the project. The inventory was done a few years ago, but we will do another soon. We will not be acquiring more
- A: Lewis: Clarified that question was about the neighborhood around Colfax, not Colfax itself.
- A: DOTI: About a half block from East Colfax radius is included in the BRT project, but the rest is included in the sidewalk replacement program.
- Q: Central Park: The original development document set out some very big plans around environmental stewardship, equity, and justice more broadly. Could anyone speak to the lessons learned within CPD to this? What sort of assessment is there for an older project in terms of how it actually worked out and how that can be implemented into new development plans?
- A: CPD: An example: the Central Park vision included a lot of mixed income communities, but now that the affordable housing is being built, these "affordable" units are at a market rate that is much higher than it should have been had it been built earlier. It's not only about what affordable housing is being built, but also WHEN. This will be reflected in future developments.
- Q: A current theme is that major grocery stores do not want to open here, thereby creating food deserts. What is the city's plan to fix this issue?
- A: CPD: This came up hugely in the planning for these communities. We cannot force grocers to open stores, but we reduce all barriers possible, including zoning to be as permissible as possible not only to grocery stores but also to community gardens and other sources of food in the area. This access to fresh food is key. Where can we work with partners that have programs to help subsidize and entice grocers to come into the neighborhoods?
- A: NEST: Particularly in Northeast Denver, there are at least three or four property owners working with non-profit grocery organizations. We try to make it known that we do have resources available to help grocers relocate to our priority organizations.
- Q: Crime is rampant in East Colfax. What steps are being taken to reduce or even eliminate the drug, prostitution, and gun violence in East Colfax? This is occurring on a daily basis here, and residents are tired of it. With so much crime going on in a

community, affordability doesn't really matter if it isn't safe to live there. How will you help to address the economic situation along the East Colfax corridor?

- A: Lewis: Place Network Investigation is occurring to be able to diagnose where you are seeing high amounts of crime occurring and be able to put in things like crime prevention by environmental design. District 8 has been working very closely not only with DPD but also looking for ways to invest in the people and the communities themselves. Who are the other partners that can come in and provide supports and resource? You will see within some of the contracts that come before council - a lot of which are coming into East Colfax - specifically to address the issues of safety in the neighborhood.
- Q: Issues of accessible housing for folks, particularly for those with disabilities or paralysis. How is the city prioritizing accessibility in all of its development?
- A: HOST: The prioritization program that is being rolled out will partner folks with accessibility needs to landlords who have accessible units. The process for matching folks with accessibility needs to appropriately accessible units has been tragically inefficient and ineffective. We hope that the prioritization program will make a big difference to help address this fundamental issue of equity.
- Q: I feel like this is really exciting that all of these groups are coming together to activate this conversation, and we are hopeful to do more of this. I don't think NEST should be so grateful for a place at the table. I feel like we need to do more to make it NEST's table. We are always playing catch-up with all of these different issues, and so maybe it's a matter of emphasis or a change in conversation.
- A: NEST: Sometimes you don't know where you are until you know where you've been. There was a point in time over the development of the relationship in which we had no relationship with CPD. Now, this is the beginning of something very new and exciting in which we will have a voice not only at the table but will be helping to direct the conversation. We have to start somewhere, and I am very grateful for the collaboration that we have been able to manifest in just a few years. There has been a lot of development in just a few years.

Final Comment from Northeast Park Hill

- Thanked the host organization, location, panel, and participants.