University Park • Denver, Colorado

UPCC General Meeting October 9, 2024

General Meeting

UPark Elementary
October 9, 2024

Board Members Present

Mike Cox
Laura Garcia
Rosemary Stoffel
Joel Cox
Rob Landis
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Slideshow Link
https://uparkcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/UPCC-2024-Fall-General-Meeting-PowerPoint.pdf

Overview

The University Park Community Council General Meeting held on October 9, 2024, covered various topics including safety announcements, crime statistics, community events, and local government updates. The meeting also addressed community concerns such as auto theft, street racing, and catalytic converter thefts. Several action items were identified for community members to participate in upcoming events and initiatives. The meeting notes also included discussions on traffic safety, sidewalk construction, and historic preservation.

Welcome and Introduction

- **Welcome Remarks**
  - Mike Cox, UPCC President, welcomed everyone to the fall meeting of the University Park Community Council.
  - Noted the higher attendance of community members compared to board members.
  - Expressed curiosity about what brought attendees to the meeting and the effectiveness of the UPCC outreach efforts.

Safety Announcements and Introductions

- **Upcoming Webinar**
  - Rob Landis announced an “Improving Safety on Denver Streets” webinar on Tuesday, October 15th from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
  - Flyers with QR codes and mini-URLs were available for attendees to access the virtual meeting.
- **Introduction of Community Resource Officer**
  - Officer Kate Young was introduced to discuss crime in the area and answer questions.
  - Officer Young has been serving the area for four and a half years and is easily reachable via email or phone.

Crime Statistics and Analysis

- **General Crime Statistics**
  - Crime stats can be accessed on Denver.gov.
  - The neighborhood is down 36% in criminal activity.
  - Violent crime is at 3%, with three incidents in the past quarter: child abuse, domestic violence, and felony menacing involving a mental health crisis.

    - Property crime is down 41%.
    - Other crimes, including restraining order violations, white-collar crimes, and drug/narcotics use, are down 29%.
- **Specific Crime Reductions**
    - Auto theft is down 42% over the three-year average.
    - Theft from motor vehicles is down 53.69%.
    - Larceny (shoplifting) is down just under 26%.
    - Burglary is down 25%.
    - Arson is down 100%.

Community Events and Engagement

- **Upcoming Events**
    - **District 3 Halloween Carnival**
        - Scheduled for Sunday, October 27th from 1 to 3 p.m. at the District 3 station.
        - Open to all, with activities for kids and adults.
    - **Coffee with the Cops**
        - Held on the first Wednesday of every month at Nixon's Coffee House, 695 East Louisiana, from 10 a.m. to noon.
        - Next session on November 6th.
    - **CAP Meeting**
        - Also on November 6th, following Coffee with the Cops.
        - A forum to discuss crime and safety with the commander and lieutenants.

Community Concerns and Responses

- **Auto Theft and Street Racing**
    - Auto theft remains a city and state problem, exacerbated during COVID.
    - Street racing is prevalent, with a task force addressing the issue.
    - Residents are encouraged to report street racing via non-emergency numbers or reportstreetracing.com.
- **Catalytic Converter Thefts**
    - Significant increase during 2020 and 2021 due to mine shutdowns.
    - The best deterrent is installing a full shield on vehicles.
- **911 and Non-Emergency Call Times**
    - Continuous efforts to improve response times.

    - Introduction of call takers working from home and a system to direct calls to the appropriate department.
    - Option to leave a message for a callback if lines are busy.

Auto Theft Prevention Programs

- **Denver Track Program**
    - **Overview**: A free auto theft prevention program.
        - **Registration**: Scan a QR code to register your vehicle, pre-filling out a police report.
        - **GPS Tracker**: Purchase and hide a GPS tracker in your car.
        - **Sticker**: Receive a “Denver Track” sticker to place on your driver’s side window.
            - **Advertising**: Sticker advertised in jails, holding cells, and probation offices to deter criminals.
        - **Reporting**: If your car is stolen, inform dispatch that you are part of Denver Track.
            - **Tracking**: Relay GPS tracking information to dispatch for real-time tracking.
- **Block Cameras**
    - **Installation**: Denver has installed block cameras throughout the city.
        - **Functionality**: Cameras read license plates and car descriptions.
        - **Success**: Significant success in mitigating auto theft.

Bike Registration Program

- **529 Garage International Program**
    - **Importance**: Bikes are the number one stolen item after license plates.
    - **Registration**: Free app to register bikes, providing a QR code specific to each bike.
        - **Reporting**: Report stolen bikes through the app.

Vehicle Safety During School Drop-off and Pick-up

- **Issue**: Increase in thefts during school drop-off and pick-up times.
    - **Advice**: Do not leave valuables or keys in the car; park and walk in with valuables.

Traffic Stops and License Plates

- **Policy Changes**
  - **Previous Policy**: No low-level traffic stops for expired or missing plates.
  - **Current Policy**: As of last week, cars without plates or with plates expired over 90 days can be pulled over.
- **Flock Cameras**
  - **Usage**: Can track vehicles through the city based on descriptions provided to dispatch.

Staffing and Recruitment

- **Current Staffing**
  - **Recruitment**: 10 new recruits coming to District 3.
    - **Training**: Recruits are not considered full officers for four months.
  - **Academy**: New academy started this week; another starting in December.
  - **Challenges**: Difficulty in finding qualified candidates.
- **Historical Context**
  - **Staffing Levels**: Current police force size is the same as in the 1970s.
    - **Growth**: Denver has grown significantly since then.
  - **Retirements**: Approximately 50 retirements since May.
- **Recruitment Efforts**
  - **Opportunities**: Encouragement to refer interested individuals for police officer or property report taker positions.

Community Safety Tips

- **Neighborhood Watch**: Importance of looking out for neighbors.
  - **Examples**: Ensuring garages are closed, cars are locked, and gates are secured.

Lamont School of Music

- **Raffle and Performances**
  - **Raffle**: Tickets for performances in October and November.
  - **Schedule**: Copies of the fall schedule and faculty performances available.

        - **Cost**: Most performances are free, faculty performances are affordable.

UPCC Survey Results and Community Interests

- **Survey Participation**
    - **Survey Objective**: To understand community interests and how to better serve residents.
    - **Response Highlights**:
        - **Long-term Residents**: Many respondents have lived in the community for a long time.
        - **Common Pets**: 83% of respondents have dogs.
        - **Favorite Amenities**: Parks are the most favored amenities in the neighborhood.
            - **Popular Parks**: Dinosaur Park, Observatory Park, and Prairie Park.
- **Community Events**
    - **Annual Events**:
        - **July 4th Event**: A popular annual celebration.
        - **Christmas Event**: Known as Sing and Sleigh, scheduled for December 8th (Sunday).
            - **Activities**: Includes seeing Santa, Sleigh, and singing carols.
        - **Summer Events**: Includes events like the food truck nights, 4th of July parade etc..

Helping Hands Initiative

- **Concept**: A community effort to create a network of neighbors willing to help each other with small tasks.
    - **Examples**: Helping with tasks like changing a light bulb.
    - **Participation**: Completely voluntary; neighbors can offer help when available.
- **Contact Information**: Interested individuals can contact Jess Wilkie at membership@uparkcc.org.

Park and Tree Management

- **Tree Preservation and Property Boundaries**
    - Discussion on the need for better information dissemination regarding tree management in parks and private properties.
    - **Example:** Many trees believed to be on private properties are actually in the right of way, which has specific rules.
    - Plan to bring in a tree expert to discuss tree management in parks and private properties.

Local Government Updates

- **Introduction by Councilman Paul Kashmann**
    - Councilman Paul Kashmann introduced himself and provided an overview of his term and responsibilities.
    - Mentioned his weekly in-district office hours at Pete's Cafe for constituents to discuss issues.
- **District Six Virtual Citizens Academy**
    - Next session is on improving safety on Denver streets.
    - **Speakers:** Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, Police Chief Roland Thomas, Jill Locantore from Denver Streets Partnership, and Stuart Anderson from Transportation Solutions.
    - **Focus:** Reducing fatalities and serious injuries on roadways.
- **Tree Preservation Ordinance**
    - Meeting with the Department of Parks and Recreation to strengthen tree preservation ordinances.
    - **Survey Data:** 75% of private property owners support more pressure to preserve the urban canopy.
    - **Plan:** Introduction of a system for champion trees and urging private property owners to respect the urban canopy.

Budget and Financial Planning

- **Budget Process Overview**
    - The mayor and the Department of Finance spend a year preparing the budget.
    - City Council receives the budget on September 13th and undergoes budget hearings.
    - **Historical Context:** Before 2015, City Council did not propose amendments to the mayor's budget. Recent years have seen significant amendments proposed.

- **Current Budget Amendments**
    - Proposed amendments total around $30 million.
    - **Specific Amendment:** $10 million for the Office of Children's Affairs for out-of-school time programming.
    - **Budget Constraints:** Tight budget year with limited extra funds.

Urban Development and Regulations

- **Gas Station Placement Ordinance**
    - Proposal to restrict new gas stations within a quarter mile of light rail stations and existing gas stations.
    - **Buffer Requirement:** 300-foot buffer from residential neighborhoods.
    - Consideration of requiring new gas stations to have EV charging stations.
- **Abandoned and Derelict Buildings**
    - Efforts to make property owners more responsible for maintaining abandoned buildings.
    - **Example:** Vacant lots turning into eyesores and affecting neighborhood quality of life.
- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)**
    - State law changes affecting setbacks and owner-occupancy requirements.
    - **Current Ordinance:** Requires property owners to live on the property if renting out an ADU. Changes to require owners live on a property only at the time of permit.

Traffic and Infrastructure

- **University Boulevard Traffic Issues**
    - Focus on improving traffic flow from I-25 to First Avenue.
    - **Specific Problem Areas:** Left turns causing congestion and safety issues.
    - **Proposed Solution:** Shrinking median islands to lengthen turn lanes.
- **Cherry Creek West Development**
    - Development plans include 850 apartments, 600,000 square feet of commercial space, and 200,000 square feet of retail.
    - **Parking:** 2,500 underground parking spaces.

Traffic Safety Concerns

- **School Zone Safety at Most Precious Blood**
    - **Issue Raised**: Lack of a stop sign in front of the school.
        - **Details**: Eastbound traffic is particularly dangerous due to sun glare and high speeds.
        - **Previous Actions**: A traffic count was conducted, but it did not justify a flashing light.
        - **Personal Experience**: The speaker has nearly been hit multiple times.
        - **Request**: Re-evaluation of the need for a stop sign or other traffic calming measures.
- **Traffic Engineering and Guidelines**
    - **Process**: Traffic engineers follow national guidelines and base decisions on traffic data.
        - **Challenge**: Data may not always reflect the on-ground reality.
        - **New Opportunity**: A new director of transportation infrastructure, Amy Ford, might bring changes.

Bike Lane Issues

- **East Yale Bike Lane**
    - **General Sentiment**: Overbuilt and confusing.
        - **Initial Data**: Shows a 20% reduction in accidents.
        - **Design Flaws**:
            - Overwhelming number of bollards and signs.
            - Poorly designed parking areas.
            - Narrow driving lanes causing issues for emergency vehicles.
            - Lack of continuity with other bike lanes.
        - **Personal Observations**:
            - Fire engines and ambulances struggle to navigate.
            - Parking areas are unsafe and poorly planned.
            - Low usage by cyclists despite the infrastructure.
- **Connected Bike System**
    - **Support**: General agreement on the need for a connected bike system.
        - **Alternative Suggestions**: Use existing trails like the Harvard-Gulch Trail instead of creating new lanes.
        - **Community Involvement**: Importance of community feedback in planning.

Housing Crisis

- **Private Equity Firms**
    - **Issue Raised**: Private equity firms buying up real estate.
        - **Legal Challenges**: Difficult to pass laws preventing these purchases due to property rights.
        - **Current Status**: City attorneys are exploring options.

Homeless Shelter and Veterans Housing

- **Tunnels to Towers Project**
    - **Location**: 1680 South Colorado Boulevard.
        - **Details**: A veterans village with 110 housing units.
        - **Timeline**: Groundbreaking in early November, completion in one year.
        - **Community Reaction**: Positive support for the project.

Traffic Light Timing

- **Colorado and Buchtel Intersection**
    - **Issue Raised**: Short left-turn light causing near collisions and dangerous conditions.
        - **Previous Actions**: Temporary improvement noticed but reverted.
        - **Jurisdiction**: Colorado Blvd. is a state highway, but the city has a working relationship for maintenance.
- **General Traffic Safety Funding**
    - **High Injury Network**: Focus on areas with high fatalities and serious injuries.
        - **Budget Constraints**: Limited resources and personnel for traffic planning and safety improvements.

Discussion on the YMCA's Development Project

- **Current Status**
    - **Project Feasibility**: There is uncertainty about whether the Y will be able to proceed with the transportation project.
        - **Consultant's Input**: A consultant working with the Y indicated that the project is currently "dead in the water."
        - **Communication Status**: No recent updates or positive developments have been reported.

- **Issues with the State Department of Transportation**
    - **Disagreements**: The Y encountered issues with the State Department of Transportation regarding proposed changes.
        - **Specific Areas**: The changes in question involve both sides of Yale Avenue and Colorado Blvd.
        - **Consultant's Perspective**: The consultant mentioned that these disagreements have stalled the project.
- **Current Outlook**: The project appears to be at a standstill with no immediate resolution in sight.

Sidewalk Construction and Maintenance

- **Construction Timeline and Responsibilities**
    - **Department Involvement**: The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure is responsible for the construction and maintenance of sidewalks.
    - **Initiative 307**: This initiative mandates an annual fee in exchange for the city taking over sidewalk repairs.
        - **Fee Details**: Homeowners will be charged $150 annually, billed twice a year on their wastewater bill.
    - **Construction Start Date**: Construction is set to begin next year.
    - **Scope of Work**: The plan includes addressing 1,100 miles of sidewalks that are too narrow for ADA requirements and 350 miles of missing sidewalks.
- **Liability and Maintenance**
    - **City Liability**: The city is liable for injuries caused by sidewalk conditions.
        - **Liability Protection**: Cities have significant liability protection, making it difficult to claim large settlements.
    - **Snow Clearing Responsibility**: Homeowners are still responsible for clearing snow from sidewalks.
- **Prioritization and Evaluation**
    - **Evaluation Process**: The city is evaluating the entire area to determine the most critical needs.
        - **Examples**: Capitol Hill has significant sidewalk issues, whereas Green Valley Ranch requires minimal work.

Panhandling and Homelessness

- **Appropriate Response to Panhandling**

    - **Police Involvement**: The recommended response is to contact the District 3 police station, which will dispatch the homeless outreach team.
        - **Outreach Team**: The team assesses the needs of individuals and informs them of appropriate behavior.
    - **Legal Ramifications**: It is challenging to incarcerate individuals for panhandling unless they are on private property.
- **Street Engagement Team**
    - **Team Activities**: The Street Engagement Team actively helps homeless individuals, including veterans.
        - **Example**: A veteran found living in a truck was placed in housing within three hours.

Traffic Issues on St. Paul Street

- **Bike Lane and Traffic Lights**: St. Paul Street is a bike lane with significant traffic due to nearby schools and traffic lights at Evans and Buchtel.
- **Dangerous Driving Behavior**: Drivers often cut off others by passing multiple cars, creating dangerous situations.
    - **Safety Concerns**: The high traffic volume and reckless driving behavior pose significant risks, especially with school traffic.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Legislation and Zoning

- **Clarification on ADU Requirements**
    - Denver legislation will require the primary owner to live in the primary residence for an ADU to be rented on a short term basis (< 30 days).
    - State law prohibits blanket prohibition of ADUs and mandates no additional parking requirements.
    - ADUs must be compatible with the existing architecture and cannot be sold separately.
    - ADUs can be rented out for long-term income even if the owner doesn't live in the primary residence.
- **Zoning and Permitting**
    - Existing zoning codes and maps were discussed, highlighting single-family residential zones.
    - The city has been approving ADUs to provide consistency and address affordable housing issues.
    - Zoning codes include specific criteria for setbacks, heights, and lot sizes.

    - ADUs must have a separate bathroom, entrance, and be fixed to a permanent foundation with utilities.
- **State vs. Local Legislation**
    - The state mandates that all single-family areas in metro specific areas must accommodate ADUs. Denver is reworking their code to accommodate this and comply. There may be some objections that go back to the State on implementation specifics.
- **Construction and Financial Considerations**
    - ADUs are not cheap and may not be a cost-effective addition compared to other home improvements.
    - Financing options include home equity loans, credit lines, and construction loans.
    - New home builders may not prioritize ADUs in new plans due to higher value in main house square footage.

Link to ABCs of ADUs Slideshow Presentation: https://uparkcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/ABCs_of_ADUs_GeneralMeeting_2024.pdf

Historic Preservation

- **University Park Historic District**
    - Rosemary Stoffel, the Historic and Preservation Chair, shared updates on the University Park Historic District.
    - The district has been recently established, with ongoing exciting developments.
- **UP Historic District wins Community Preservation Award from Historic Denver**
    - **Award Recognition**: The Community Preservation Award recognizes exceptional contributions to preserving Denver's heritage through careful consideration of the city's historic fabric and demonstrating a commitment to the community.