

Coffee Notes – November 5, 2007

Topic: City Manager's Update

Speaker: City Manager AJ Krieger

Q) A resident asked if there had been any movement on the "ladder issue," with regards to building inspectors.

A) Mr. Krieger responded that contractors could call inspectors out within a half day of finishing the projects to schedule inspections as close as possible to the completion of the work.

He added that the City had recently adopted new construction codes that would help to iron out similar misunderstandings. He also said it seemed likely that the City would be providing ladders to the inspectors for roofing inspections.

Q) A resident was dismayed that broken streetlights on their street were not repaired in a timely fashion even after they called 9-1-1.

A) The City Manager advised the resident that many street lamps are the property of Xcel Energy, and it would be necessary to contact them to have the light repaired. He noted that 9-1-1 calls after hours are routed to Adams County Sheriff's office, and because they deal primarily with police emergencies, it was unlikely they would be able to keep track of low priority information to pass it on to Xcel or City staff.

In the future, he recommended residents contact City Hall during business hours so that staff could pursue getting the bulb replaced or expediting Excel's repairs on the lights.

At this point, Mr. Krieger said he would talk for a few minutes about Code Enforcement, which has been of high importance to residents attending Coffee with the Mayor.

Mr. Krieger pointed out that his last position was in a city that was 115 years old, and the position before that was a city, which was 170 years old. In both cases, he said the cities were more urban than Northglenn, had more poverty than Northglenn, but had more experience in dealing with the challenges of code compliance.

Mr. Krieger said that in his experience, he was hearing two major arguments: Residents believe that nothing is being done because from what they can see, nothing seems to change; and staff argue that contacts are made and citations can be issued, but some people simply refuse to comply with city codes.

Properties that have code violations also come in two main categories according to the City Manager: The first category consists of those properties that are in serious disrepair. They exhibit substandard living conditions, trash or other items in the yard, etc. The second category consists of those properties that by and large are in compliance, but have one or two violations such as tall grass, or extra vehicles etc.

The challenge, Mr. Krieger believes, comes from situations where the City does not have authority to enforce consequences of persistent code violations, and when there are legitimate reasons for code violations such as residents that have health problems that prevent them from maintaining the property, and/or residents that simply cannot afford to maintain the property.

Mr. Krieger said that it was possible to crack down hard on all violators and, “beat people over the head,” with the municipal code, but when you use that approach, you will never attain the kind of widespread compliance that is the goal of code enforcement. In his eyes, having to take the homeowner to court is a failure. A success of the code process would be to make contact with the property owner and get them to want to comply and fix the problems before citation and litigation become necessary.

The City Manager said that code enforcement should be a public service that works toward a higher goal. When that became the focus for code enforcement in the other cities he had worked for, they saw an increase in the number of inspections (because code enforcement was out making personable contacts with residents), and a decrease in the number of court cases (because fewer violations proceeded all the way to the court). This change was evident over three consecutive years.

Mr. Krieger briefly mentioned the creation of the Planning and Development Department, and explained how everything related to planning and development would now be under a single department making it easier for residents and businesses to find out who they should be contacting for planning and development issues.

A resident asked what kind of repercussions would be in store for someone who, despite trying numerous measures, could not get grass to grow in certain areas of their lawn and then fell out of compliance with city codes.

The City Manager responded that his plans for code enforcement would ensure that violations would be looked at on a case-by-case basis, and that it ultimately wouldn't make sense to write someone up for that because they've already expressed a desire to be in compliance. Citing them would generate more ill will, and still wouldn't make the grass grow.

A resident asked if the clean sweep process was complete.

The City Manager responded that the key was a sustained effort to keep people informed of the codes and to shift the focus away from all properties to those that demonstrate multiple, or gross violations of municipal codes.

A resident asked if the new positions called for in the budget were necessary.

Mr. Krieger responded that they were definitely necessary and that, because of the reorganization, there was only a net gain of two positions and they were police officers.

A resident asked if the street sweeping would continue.

Mr. Krieger said that it would.

A resident related a story of a neighbor that went bankrupt because of vendors installing substandard appliances and windows.

Mr. Krieger said that one way to make sure that appliances and windows are up to code would be to have a licensed contractor do the work, or to call for a building inspector to inspect the work. Beyond that, the homeowner/victim would need to seek civil remedies.

A resident pointed out that the bulletproof vests worn by code enforcement officers created an atmosphere of confrontation when contacting residents.

The Mayor said she agreed and would like code enforcement to adopt a more friendly appearance called for by the City Managers plan for the department.

Council Member, and former police officer, Jim Miller interjected that removing the bullet-proof vests (currently worn under code enforcement uniforms), presented a serious safety hazard to the officers when they contacted homeowners.

A resident asked if code inspectors would have the authority to refer those physically or financially incapable of bring properties into code compliance to resources that may help them do so.

The City Manager responded that not only would they have the authority, but also they would be expected to do so.

A resident asked if there was some kind of balance that could be struck between certain code violations that would require property owner involvement, and those that could be handled by renters, in the case of rental properties.

Mr. Krieger responded that the City was legally required to deal with the property owner and they could work out maintenance issues with the tenants either by informal agreement, or by adding certain items to the lease document.

A resident asked if the water rates would go down since the water bond will be paid off in 2009 and possibly as early as 2008.

The City Manager said they probably would not, but that the funds would go to maintaining the system or possibly to capital improvement projects.

A resident asked about progress on the improvements to the Croke Reservoir Natural Area.

Mr. Krieger said that the improvements to the reservoir were budgeted for 2008 and will

occur barring some kind of disaster.

In closing, Mr. Krieger asked for residents to watch for improvements over the next year while the neighborhood initiatives take affect.