



PLANNING COMMISSION A G E N D A

May 2, 2024

Notice is hereby given of a Public Meeting to be held before the City of Wheat Ridge Planning Commission on May 2, 2024 at 6:30 p.m.

This meeting will be conducted as a virtual meeting and in person at 7500 W. 29th Avenue, Municipal Building. The public may participate in these ways:

1. Provide comment in advance at www.wheatridgespeaks.org (comment by noon on May 1)
2. Virtually attend and participate in the meeting through a device or phone:
 - [Click here to join and provide public comment](#) (create a Zoom account to join)
 - Or call 1-669-900-6833 with Meeting ID 837 8229 2839 **and Passcode: 129740**
3. View the meeting live or later at www.wheatridgespeaks.org, Channel 8, or YouTube Live at <https://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/view>
4. Attend in person.

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- 1. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**
 - 2. ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS**
 - 3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
 - 4. APPROVE THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA**
 - 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – April 18, 2024**
 - 6. PUBLIC FORUM (This is the time for any person to speak on any subject not appearing on the agenda. Public comments may be limited to 3 minutes.)**

(continued on next page)

7. PUBLIC HEARING *

No cases to be heard.

8. OLD BUSINESS

9. NEW BUSINESS

- A. City Plan Update
- B. Upcoming Dates
- C. Project and Development Updates
- D. Commissioner Updates

10. ADJOURNMENT

* Public comment is welcome during any public hearing item. The standard procedure for a public hearing is as follows:

- a. Staff presentation
- b. Applicant presentation – if applicable
- c. Public comment – time may be limited at the discretion of the Chair, often to 3 minutes
- d. Staff/applicant response
- e. Close public hearing
- f. Commission discussion and decision

Individuals with disabilities are encouraged to participate in all public meetings sponsored by the City of Wheat Ridge. Call Amanda Harrison, Public Information Officer at 303-235-2877 at least one week in advance of a meeting if you are interested in participating and need inclusion assistance.



PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of Meeting
April 18, 2024

1. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chair DISNEY at 6:30 p.m. This meeting was held in person and virtually, using Zoom video-teleconferencing technology.

2. ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Commission Members Present: Kristine Disney
Daniel Graeve
Krista Holub
Will Kerns
Michael Moore
Patrick Quinn
Syrma Quinones
Jonathan Schelke

Commission Members Absent:

Staff Members Present: Jana Easley, Planning Manager
Alayna Olivas-Loera, Planner II
Tammy Odean, Recording Secretary

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

4. APPROVE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

It was moved by consensus to approve the order of the agenda.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 21, 2024

It was moved by Commissioner QUINN and seconded by Commissioner SCHELKE to approve the minutes of March 21, 2024, as written. Motion carried 7-0-1 with Commissioner GRAEVE abstaining.

6. PUBLIC FORUM (This is the time for any person to speak on any subject not appearing on the agenda.)

No one wished to speak at this time.

7. PUBLIC HEARING

- A. **Case No. WZ-24-04**: an application filed by Cogent Companies for approval of a zone change from Agriculture-One (A-1) to Industrial-Employment (I-E) on property located at Parcel ID 39-193-01-010.

Vice Chair DISNEY opened the public hearing.

Ms. Olivas-Loera gave a short presentation regarding the zone change and the application. She entered into the record the contents of the case file, packet materials, the zoning ordinance, and the contents of the digital presentation. She stated the public notice and posting requirements have been met, therefore the Planning Commission has jurisdiction to hear this case.

Vice Chair DISNEY opened the public hearing.

In response to a question from Commissioner SCHELKE regarding vertical development and storage on this site, Ms. Olivas-Loera explained that no permanent structures can be built and there is no restriction on what can be stored. Ms. Easley added that the fire code would cover any flammable substances.

Commissioner QUINN inquired if there are other properties zoned I-E in the City.

Ms. Olivas-Loera explained that most of the I-E zoned properties are concentrated in the northwestern portion of the city, but there are not many.

Commissioner HOLUB asked if there were any other conditions that were considered but not recommended by the City Attorney.

Ms. Olivas-Loera said not that she was aware of.

Commissioner GRAEVE wondered if this property could be rezoned again should the property be dedicated as right-of-way.

Ms. Olivas-Loera clarified that it would not need to be rezoned to be dedicated as right-of-way.

Commissioner QUINONES inquired about a question that came about during the neighborhood meeting re lighting at the site.

Ms. Olivas-Loera explained that, if approved, the lighting will be reviewed during the site plan process and a photometric plan will be required.

Commissioner KERNS commented that this is a great use to preserve right-of-way for a future transportation project, if needed, and is a good use of land in the meantime.

Public Comment

Vice Chair DISNEY opened the public comment.

ML Richardson, neighbor
14802 W. 44th Avenue

Ms. Richardson mentioned she works for the property owner to the west of this site and gave a little bit of history. She mentioned she would like the access point to stay off of Holman Street and said she would like a fence/screen put up so her workers know where to store their equipment since they have been using Longs Peak Metro District's land to store their equipment in the past.

Vice Chair DISNEY closed the public comment and public hearing.

It was moved by Commissioner MOORE and seconded by KERNS, to recommend approval of Case No. WZ-24-04, which is a request for approval of a zone change from Agricultural-One (A-1) to Industrial-Employment (I-E) at Parcel ID 39-193-01-010, for the following reasons:

- 1. The proposed zoning will promote the public health, safety, or welfare of the community and does not result in an adverse effect on the surrounding area.**
- 2. Utility infrastructure can adequately service the property.**
- 3. The proposed zone change is responding to a change of character in the area.**
- 4. The proposed zone change is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.**
- 5. The zoning designation is appropriate and compatible with the adjacent designations on private property.**

And with the following conditions:

- 1. No vertical construction is permitted; outdoor storage and appropriate screening are the only permitted uses.**
- 2. A development agreement running with the land will be required to be recorded with the zone change ordinance to document such use and development limitations and to ensure future dedication of the property as necessary for the originally intended purpose of infrastructure and right-of-way at no cost.**

Motion carried 8-0.

B. Case No. WZ-24-03: an application filed by Mark Brannon for approval of a zone change from Agriculture-One (A-1) to Residential-One B (R-1B) on property located at 10840 W. 41st Place.

Ms. Olivas-Loera gave a short presentation regarding the zone change and the application. She entered into the record the contents of the case file, packet materials, the zoning ordinance, and the contents of the digital presentation. She stated the public notice and posting requirements have been met, therefore the Planning Commission has jurisdiction to hear this case.

Commissioner GRAEVE asked what the process is for a subdivision and how many homes in Wheat Ridge are as old as the one on this property.

Ms. Olivas-Loera explained that an application will be submitted, and logical lot layout will be looked at in addition to the minimum development standards being met. She also mentioned that this home is one of the older homes in the city, but it is not uncommon and there are a few in the city.

Commissioner QUINN inquired if the barn is going to be moved.

Mark Brannon, property owner
9005 W 68th Avenue

Mr. Brannon gave a brief history of the structures on the property and mentioned that the barn does not meet the front yard setbacks and to build a new house the barn will have to be moved.

In response to a question from Commissioner SCHELKE, Mr. Brannon said the new house he builds will be a reasonable 2-story house and possibly an ADU.

Public Comment

Vice Chair DISNEY opened the public comment.

Kathy Gallagher, resident
10820 W. 41st Place

Ms. Gallagher mentioned her property is directly east of said property and is concerned that sunlight to her solar panels will be blocked.

Vice Chair DISNEY closed the public comment.

Commissioner KERNS explained that a 2-story house will have a negligible effect on solar exposure because most of the solar exposure will come from the south.

Commissioner HOLUB asked if per code that neighborhood will still be preserved with a 2-story house.

Ms. Olivas-Loera mentioned that per the development standards the height limit is 35 feet and there are bulk plane requirements in place.

Vice Chair DISNEY closed the public hearing.

It was moved by Commissioner QUINONES and seconded by Commissioner QUINN to recommend approval of Case No. WZ-24-03, a zone change from Agricultural-One (A-1) to Residential-One B (R-1B) for property located at 10840 W. 41st Place, for the following reasons:

- 1. The proposed zone change will promote the public health, safety, or welfare of the community and does not result in an adverse effect on the surrounding area.**
- 2. Utility infrastructure adequately services the property.**
- 3. The proposed zone change is consistent with the goals and objectives of the City's Comprehensive Plan and consistent with the character of existing neighborhoods.**
- 4. The zone change will provide additional opportunity for reinvestment in the area.**
- 5. The criteria used to evaluate a zone change supports the request.”**

Motion carried 8-0.

8. OLD BUSINESS

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Election of Officers

Commissioner DISNEY was elected as Chair.
Commissioner QUINN was elected as Vice Chair.

B. Upcoming Dates

Ms. Easley mentioned that there will be a City Plan Update at the May 2 meeting, and there will be Planning Commission training at the May 16 meeting.

C. Project and Development Updates

No updates currently.

D. Commissioner Updates

No updates currently.

10. ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Commissioner QUINN and seconded by Commissioner MOORE to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Motion carried 6-0.

Kristine Disney, Chair

Tammy Odean, Recording Secretary

DRAFT

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

In March 2020, to help control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the City of Wheat Ridge began conducting virtual meetings for City Council, Planning Commission and other boards. Virtual meetings encourage public participation as usual while also keeping the community, elected officials, staff and residents safe while continuing to conduct important City business.

Starting in June 2021, the City returned to in-person public meetings and also retained the option for virtual public participation. The City will continue using this hybrid meeting format for the City Council and Planning Commission; this means that public meetings will continue to be virtually accessible and will also be held in-person if allowed by public health guidelines on the respective meeting date. This guide describes the various ways in which the public may participate in public meetings.

1. TO COMMENT IN ADVANCE

- Click this link: www.wheatridgespeaks.org
- Use Wheat Ridge Speaks to review agendas and staff reports and to submit written comment.
- For City Council meetings on Wheat Ridge Speaks:
 - You may submit comments at any time until noon on the day of the meeting.
 - For public hearings related to development or zoning, content will be posted about 10 days in advance.
 - For all other agenda items, content will be posted about 4 days in advance.
- For Planning Commission meetings on Wheat Ridge Speaks:
 - You may submit comments until noon the day before the meeting.
 - Content will be posted about 10 days in advance.

2. TO COMMENT VIRTUALLY DURING THE LIVE MEETING (by web or phone)

Join the live meeting through the web link or phone number (with access code) provided on the calendar on the City's website and provided on the top of all meeting agendas. Find the calendar at www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar

- You will be joined into the meeting and automatically muted.
- When public comment is invited, all participants will be unmuted and called upon by last name. (For example, the Mayor or meeting Chair may say: "Now is the time for public comment. All members of the public will be unmuted. Please mute yourself or keep background noise to a minimum. If your last name begins with A through F, you may now speak.")
- Please only join via the Zoom web or phone meeting if you intend to participate. If you wish to simply view the meeting, see option 4 below.

3. TO COMMENT IN PERSON

- Confirm that local health guidelines allow the meeting to be held in-person. The meeting format will be described on the City's calendar at www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/calendar
- When you arrive, sign up on the roster to speak on a specific agenda item.
- Review these tips for commenting during a public meeting or hearing: <https://bit.ly/WRPublicHearings>

4. TO VIEW THE MEETING LIVE OR LATER

The meeting will be live streamed and archived for viewing at:

- www.wheatridgespeaks.org (watch here to follow along with the agenda packet)
- Channel 8 on your Comcast feed
- YouTube Live www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/view

HELPFUL TIPS FOR A GOOD VIRTUAL MEETING EXPERIENCE

- If joining through the web, log on 5 minutes before the start of the meeting, since some online products require downloads and installation.
- State your name when you speak.
- Turn off nearby cell phones, if you are using a computer to connect.
- Please use a headset or earbuds.
- **Only** have the virtual meeting application open on your computer. If you are running other programs like email or have additional websites open in your browser, it will interfere with your ability to hear or see the information. Close all other applications and windows when participating.
- Please limit distractions when possible. Be aware of background noise.
- Video streaming is a relatively new technology. Some things to be mindful of when connecting with your computer/tablet or smart phone.
 - If your computer/tablet or smart phone is older than 2015 it is recommended that you use a landline/standard telephone to dial into the virtual meeting number to ensure that you can hear the meeting clearly.
 - Internet service minimum needs to be 40-50 Mbps for best results with a virtual meeting.
 - Depending on the Internet speed and service in your neighborhood, the most reliable way to participate in the meeting is to call the phone number provided, rather than joining the meeting through the web link.

Memorandum

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Ella Stueve, Senior Neighborhood Planner

DATE: April 26, 2024 (for May 2 meeting)

SUBJECT: City Plan

PURPOSE

The purpose of this meeting is to provide Planning Commission with an update on the City Plan process, including preliminary findings from the first phase of public engagement and the existing conditions analysis completed thus far, and to have a strategic dialogue with the commissioners.

Attachment 1 is a memo provided by the City Plan consultant, czb, which includes more details to support this discussion. This is the first of four anticipated Planning Commission meetings on this project, with subsequent study sessions scheduled for July, October, and early 2025.

BACKGROUND

Wheat Ridge is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan, called the City Plan. The City Plan will supersede Envision Wheat Ridge, which was adopted in 2009. Some of the most significant City actions taken since then originate from the Envision Wheat Ridge document, including the 38th Avenue “main street” concept, subarea plans to address changing neighborhood conditions, and the Clear Creek Crossing development. Since 2009, much of what was recommended in Envision Wheat Ridge has been implemented, and the city has determined that it is time to update the plan.

The City Plan will articulate a community vision for Wheat Ridge through 2045. A specific focus will be to ensure robust community input and to create a plan that balances different values and tradeoffs that emerge from community conversations. A successful City Plan process will result in an adopted document that reflects community values and acts as a foundation for future City decisions around all topics related to the physical development of the City for years to come.

PROJECT STATUS

Timeline

This 15-month process began in late January with a project team kick-off, beginning with the first phase, “Discover: Existing Conditions.” The week of April 15th began the project’s first public engagement phase, which included the following events:

- A City Council study session on Monday, April 15
- A public open house on Tuesday, April 16
- A steering committee meeting on Wednesday, April 17

The final step for this engagement phase is a Planning Commission meeting on Thursday, May 2.

The subsequent phases will occur in June, September, and February 2025, followed up by the Planning Commission conversations listed above. It is anticipated that the final plan will be brought to Planning Commission and City Council for final adoption in spring of 2025. The final plan will include a summary of existing conditions, a community character and development vision, an integrated land use and mobility framework, a future land use map, street typologies, an action plan, and other elements as needed.

Steering Committee

The City Plan has an 18-member steering committee made up of community members representing a range of perspectives, including residents, business owners, commercial and residential real estate, planning, development, housing, finance, transportation, and arts and culture. The steering committee had its first meeting on March 14, and the second meeting was April 17. There will be a total of six meetings throughout the planning process. The steering committee will provide guidance during the planning process to supplement public participation and to lend citizen expertise to the planning team. They will also help spread the word about the City Plan.

Public Process

Since December 2023, the City Plan project page on What's Up Wheat Ridge has been live: <https://whatsupwheatridge.com/city-plan>. In January 2024, the project team sent a newsletter to all What's Up Wheat Ridge subscribers to announce the project page and to encourage community members to subscribe to project updates and become neighborhood champions. Neighborhood champions are a group of people who live, work, or have general interest in Wheat Ridge and who want to stay up to speed on the City Plan and help promote City Plan participation. Anyone is welcome to become a neighborhood champion, and the sign up form to join this group will be available throughout the planning process. As of April 22, the City Plan page had 245 subscribers, and 73 community members had signed up to be neighborhood champions. Staff have been distributing yard signs and project half-sheets to neighborhood champions and other members of the community.

The City Plan kickoff event was a public open house on Tuesday, April 16 from 4:30 to 6:30pm at the Wheat Ridge Recreation Center. At this event, over 100 participants had the opportunity to learn more about the plan and share their initial thoughts on the city's future. There were four stations where community members could learn about the project, provide input on core values, review and comment on an existing conditions analysis, and participate in an exercise to identify and rank priorities that this plan should address. This information and these activities are also available online on the project website through May 3. As of April 22, 75 members of the community had participated in the online survey.

Communications for this phase of public engagement has included the following:

- What's Up Wheat Ridge newsletters
- Connections newsletters
- Rooted in Fun Activity Guide advertisement
- Mayor's Matters articles
- City of Wheat Ridge's website newsflash

- Project half-sheets available at upcoming community events and distributed to neighborhood champions and steering committee members
- Yard signs distributed to neighborhood champions and steering committee members and displayed at City parks and facilities
- Social media ads and posts
- Coasters with a QR code to the project webpage distributed to local businesses to give to customers

Each subsequent engagement phase will continue to use these communications methods and more.

Existing Conditions and Next Steps

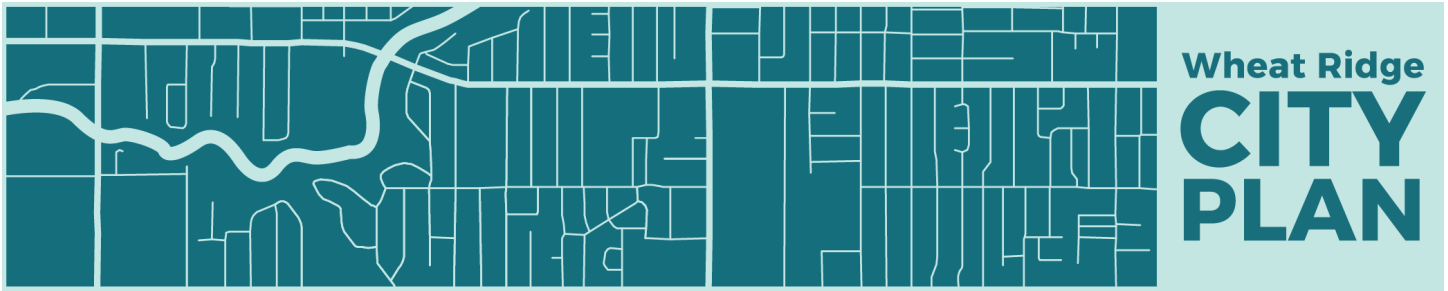
The City Plan consultant czb has conducted an existing conditions analysis for Wheat Ridge, the findings of which are summarized in Attachment 1. This analysis and the information gathered in this first round of public engagement will be used to finalize the “Discovery: Existing Conditions” phase of the project and to inform the second phase of the planning process, “Envision: Development Vision.” In the second phase, the project team will draft focus area concepts, a character and development vision, and a draft land use and mobility framework for public consideration, vetting, and feedback.

PLANNING COMMISSION FEEDBACK REQUESTED

The next step of the planning process is to use the existing conditions analysis and public feedback to inform subsequent technical work by the project team and public discussion of the city’s development vision in Engagement Round 2. The project team is requesting that the Planning Commission come to the May 2 meeting prepared to learn about how the project team defines a great plan, hear a preliminary review of the previous events in the first phase of public engagement, and participate in a discussion around what the project team is calling “Big Things.” This is an exercise designed to identify and prioritize topic areas that the City Plan should address. Additionally, staff is requesting that Planning Commission provide feedback and reactions to the existing conditions analysis presented as part of Attachment 1.

Attachments

1. City Plan Status Update, April 2024



City Plan Status Update, April 2024

Prepared by czb
April 22, 2024

Introduction

This update document is intended to share information about key items of importance in the transition between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Wheat Ridge City Plan. Phase 1 is focused on project start-up activities and existing conditions analysis, while Phase 2 is focused on the community's vision for the future. This update should be considered a summary, not exhaustive, and covers the following:

- What Makes a Great City Plan?
- The Importance of Core Values
- czb's Preliminary Hunches
- Preliminary Existing Conditions Analysis
- Focus of Engagement Round 1 (April 2024)

What Makes a Great City Plan?

A City Plan is a blueprint for the community's future. It provides guidance on where and how the community will invest and change over the next 20 years. It contains maps, vision and goals for the future, and policies to address topics ranging from land use and economics, to housing, to transportation and community services.

The purpose of a City Plan is to provide long-range guidance to property owners, residents, elected and appointed officials, City staff, and others. It informs decisions on land use issues, such as where and what type of future development should occur.

It plans for what is known. A great plan creates clarity around trends and issues that are measurable, allowing a community to make well-informed choices that are likely to achieve desired outcomes.

It gets the 'Big Things' right. A great plan identifies a few issues that are so important to a community's future that they require focused attention and resources to ensure they are handled correctly. When attention is scattered or resources are spread too thin, inaction or half-measures become the norm.

It creates a decision-making framework for what is unknown. A great plan recognizes that the unforeseen happens every day, and therefore provides a decision-making framework (tied to core values) for circumstances that cannot be predicted

The Importance of Core Values

A community's core values are deeply-held and widely-shared beliefs that serve as building blocks for the community's vision and shape how decisions are made. These values can evolve over generations, but they are durable and have a lasting impact. When a community knows what it values, important public decisions become more straightforward (if not always easy) and the community is not left adrift when the unforeseen occurs. During the City Plan process, Wheat Ridge's core values will be identified and joined to a complementary set of planning principles to form a community decision-making framework.

czb's Preliminary Hunches

As a firm, czb has extensive experience in Wheat Ridge, and also extensive comprehensive planning experience from elsewhere. The combination of the two inform a preliminary set of "hunches" about what will matter in the City Plan project. These are biases that our team freely admits, and are open for discussion and disagreement (or confirmation) with stakeholders.

Wheat Ridge's market has strengthened, presenting opportunities.

- The city now has choices it might not have had in years past.
- These choices will revolve around how much it wants to leverage that strength, and for what.
- Choosing to make the most of an improved market position may come with tradeoffs, and such tradeoffs will be an important part of the City Plan process.

Common themes from past engagement efforts are likely to reemerge.

- Community character, density, and height will all be important topics.
- The state of the city's corridors, both private and public realms, will be on the community's collective mind.
- Desires will be expressed for more and/or better retail, restaurant, shopping and "third place" options.

Future change will be confined to a few key areas, not everywhere.

- The city has many miles of commercial corridors, and not all will be ready for change.
- There may be a relatively large amount of commercial space for the local trade area.
- There is likely a need to concentrate, not disperse, economic activity.
- There will be some locations—perhaps many—where significant change will not be desired.

Preliminary Existing Conditions Analysis

The existing conditions analysis work is ongoing and considered “draft” work product until a draft City Plan is delivered. However, there are some things that can be shared early in the process that have informed and will continue to inform the City Plan process. The data and analysis are generally organized into the following categories: Community Profile, Corridors, Mobility, Commercial Centers, and Community Character. Additional information related to Infrastructure and Areas of Stability and Change will follow at a later date. Some highlights of early findings:

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Population growth returned in the 2010s.

Since becoming a city, Wheat Ridge has never experienced periods of rapid population growth. Its highest rate of growth occurred in the 1990s when the population increased by about 12%. Wheat Ridge actually lost population during the 1980s and the 2000s.

The 2010s were a decade of population growth again for the city. New population was partially attributable to members of the Millennial generation moving into Wheat Ridge.

Wheat Ridge got a bit younger in the 2010s.

By 2010, Wheat Ridge had become an older community with a median age that was three full years older than the median for Jefferson County. Between 2010 and 2020, however, Wheat Ridge’s median age fell by over 2.5 years while the county’s remained about the same.

This lower median age was a result of younger people moving into Wheat Ridge. During the decade, the number of Millennials born 1981-1995 increased by over 3,000 people (a 62% increase), as the numbers of residents in older generations fell.

Educational attainment and incomes are on the rise.

Wheat Ridge has historically had lower educational attainment than its neighbors as measured by the proportion of college graduates in its adult population, which is defined as those aged 25 and older. But between 2015 and 2022, Wheat Ridge increased its rate of bachelor’s degree attainment by 10.4 percentage points, while Jefferson County increased its rate by 7.5 points.

Educational attainment and incomes are correlated, and this may help explain why incomes began to rise in a noticeable way during the late 2010s. This was especially true for family households—per the Census Bureau, families must include at least two related people—in which median income increased by over 50%.

HOUSING MARKET

Wheat Ridge is a (barely) majority ownership community dominated by mid-20th Century houses.

Wheat Ridge has had a fairly steady rate of homeownership since 1990. The homeownership rate increased from 53.5% in 1990 to 54.6% in 2000, remained at that level until 2010, and then decreased again to 53.1% by 2020. The growth in new housing units for the ownership market slowed through 2010, but increased somewhat in the following decade. The majority of the city’s single-unit houses pre-date the city’s incorporation, and fewer than 20 new single-unit detached

houses have been built annually since 1990. During the 2010s and 2020s, the production of attached townhomes outpaced that of detached houses. Wheat Ridge added 438 new townhomes and 222 detached houses from 2010 to 2023.

Home values have risen in the past decade, causing serious affordability concerns for buyers.

As the Denver regional economy and housing demand strengthened through the 2010s and beyond, the effects were felt in Wheat Ridge home prices. Wheat Ridge's historic affordability eroded as prices rose and, by 2020, it was difficult to find a house for much less than \$500,000. The incomes necessary to purchase a home in Wheat Ridge also rose with prices, such that in the early 2020s, few buyers will have household incomes below \$150,000.

After nearly four decades without rental development, new units have come online in large numbers.

Wheat Ridge historically has been a city with a large proportion of rental units, many of them dating to the middle of the last century. Nearly half of all Wheat Ridge households are renters. However, from 1980 to 2019, no new market-rate rental units were added to the city's housing supply. (A limited number of subsidized affordable units were built during that time.)

Things changed during the 2010s as Denver area rental demand grew, and Wheat Ridge was eventually able to capture some of that demand by adding new rental projects. Planning work, regulatory changes, and redevelopment incentives paved the way for new projects around the intersection of Wadsworth and 38th Avenue, at Clear Creek Crossing, and near the Ward Station. As of early 2024, nearly 1,000 new market-rate rental units have been added since 2020, with more on the way at Clear Creek Crossing.

For many renters, incomes have not quite kept up with rising rents.

Wheat Ridge historically has been among the more affordable rental locations in the Denver area, and specifically on the west side of the region. Partially this is attributable to the presence of subsidized housing (both in directly subsidized units and through the use of housing vouchers), and partially it is due to the existence of a large supply of older rental units which tend to have lower rents than newer units.

Average and median rents have risen in Wheat Ridge as regional rental demand and overall real estate values have increased. Renter incomes, however, have begun to fall behind rents in recent years. Depending on the data source, an income of about \$60,000 is required to afford the average unit in Wheat Ridge, but the median renter household income was about \$50,000 as of the most recent data in 2022, with half of renter households having incomes below that figure.

CORRIDORS AND MOBILITY

Major street corridors and gateways in Wheat Ridge are generally auto-oriented and lack a sense-of-place.

A 2024 urban design assessment of the major corridors completed by czb demonstrated that many of them lack the physical and aesthetic attributes that make a major city street feel safe and inviting. The visual assessment considered several urban design qualities that contribute to place-making, such as enclosure, frontage, and human scale. Most corridors rated as "Fair," the second lowest ranking, on the assessment scale.

Many of the design shortcomings on these corridors stem from being built with a focus on the automobile with little consideration to the needs of other users such as pedestrians and bicyclists. Poor interfaces and frontages – the connectivity between the public and private realms – as well as the lack of street trees and the prevalence of expansive front yard parking lots contribute to the poor sense-of-place.

Many key corridors in Wheat Ridge carry high daily traffic volumes, making it challenging to comfortably accommodate non-motorized users.

According to data from the City and the Colorado Department of Transportation, Kipling Street and Wadsworth Boulevard both carry an average annual daily count of more than 35,000 vehicles per day. Streets and roadways with volumes more than 20,000 per day typically require multiple lanes in each direction and include higher travel speeds. Non-motorized facilities along these corridors are limited. Other corridors such as parts of W 38th Avenue and W 44th Avenue have daily volumes well under 20,000 and could be candidates for improved bike and pedestrian facilities.

Even areas that have sidewalks often aren't comfortable places to walk.

The sidewalk itself doesn't make a city walkable. There are several factors that contribute to walkable places including the placement of the sidewalk, width of sidewalks, buffers from traffic, street trees, connections to adjacent development and other uses, and even the ability to cross the street all play a role. Comfort is critical. Much of Wheat Ridge includes sidewalks but they are typically along the curb with no buffer from adjacent traffic. This is an uncomfortable feeling for most pedestrians.

Bicycle facilities are limited, and the Clear Creek Trail is difficult to access without a car.

Depending on where one is riding, biking in Wheat Ridge is difficult. Type A cyclists – the riders that are comfortable riding in the travel lane with automobiles – will often ride regardless of whether there are dedicated on-street bike facilities. Most other riders, especially recreational riders, need dedicated bike facilities to feel comfortable. Based on map data provided by the city, Wheat Ridge has approximately 7.5 miles of on-street bike facilities. The Clear Creek Trail is a great facility for bike riders, but most users need to drive to a trail head to access the trail. Expanding the network of bicycle facilities throughout neighborhoods and providing low-stress routes will not only improve access to the trail but expand opportunities for residents to use a bicycle for both transportation and recreation purposes throughout Wheat Ridge

Improving non-motorized access to and around key community assets could be an effective approach.

Wheat Ridge should look to the 2017 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and other recent planning initiatives aimed at improving non-motorized mobility in Wheat Ridge, and consider focusing those improvements aimed at providing access to and around key assets.

Assets to consider include:

- Parks, open space, and trail heads
- Neighborhood commercial centers
- Schools
- Transit stops

Commercial Centers

There are five locations that can reasonably be categorized as commercial centers (Kipling Ridge, Wheat Ridge Market Place, Applewood Village, Gold's Marketplace, and Ridge Village/Chase Plaza). These centers generally provide commercial and general services catering to the daily convenience needs of the surrounding residential neighborhoods and beyond. Grocery stores often serve as the primary anchor for a center, and four of the five centers include a grocery in their commercial mix. Approximately 75% of the community's geographical area is located within one mile of these four centers. The exception is the far northwest section of the city surrounding the Wheat Ridge/Ward Road Station, where very little commercial development currently exists. None of the centers are particularly walkable.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Community character may come to have two meanings in the City Plan process. For some, character is physical: what they see when they drive along the city's commercial and residential streets – what the buildings and the streetscape look like. For others, community character represents something intangible and much more difficult to express – a combination of history and culture. It's the “way of life” in the community. At this time, the existing conditions analysis has focused on the physical part of community character, with the following preliminary insights:

- Wheat Ridge lacks a coherent, unified character, though many locations in Wheat Ridge have their own identifiable character. One example of this is the city's variety of neighborhoods, many of which reflect specific residential eras and styles.
- Commercial areas are generally suburban, auto oriented, and a bit dated. 38th Avenue is the closest thing to a “Main Street” community center, but is not quite there.
- New development hints at a more urban future, but there has not been enough development in a concentrated location to confirm this.
- Strong regional demand has found Wheat Ridge and home prices are high. Demand at these prices will likely be for larger and newer housing types than Wheat Ridge generally offers, meaning pressure to demolish and rebuild aging residential structures may increase.
- Whether Wheat Ridge should one day have a character that feels unified, or whether it should remain a “place full of places” is a question to explore in the City Plan.

Focus of Engagement Round 1

The City Plan will feature four rounds of public engagement. The first round, taking place in April of 2024, is focused on the following:

CORE VALUES

During the City Plan process, Wheat Ridge's core values will be identified and joined to a complementary set of planning principles to form a community decision-making framework. Seemingly simple questions can help to extract core values, such as “What is one thing you would change about Wheat Ridge and one thing you would want to keep the same?” or “What one

word best describes the future Wheat Ridge in which you hope to live?" Part of the round 1 engagement will be aimed in this direction.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The existing conditions analysis shared in this update document has also been shared with the public in the first round of engagement.

BIG THINGS

czb's comprehensive planning work is highly dependent on getting the 'Big Things' right. 'Big Things' are those long-term projects or issues that a community simply cannot afford to mess up. Whatever the 'Big Things' are, if the City Plan does not properly address them, the plan will not be considered a success. There are never a dozen 'Big Things'. Rarely are there even five. Usually there are about three 'Big Things' that a community can generally agree upon.

In the first engagement round, the community has been asked to help prioritize or identify the 'Big Things' this planning process should address by selecting from a preliminary list, or helping to change the list. The first draft of potential 'Big Things' was synthesized from discussion with the project's Steering Committee and subsequent discussion with City staff. City Council shared their thoughts about 'Big Things' during a study session on April 15th. The initial list, as well as City Council's input, will be shared as part of the presentation at the May 2nd Planning Commission meeting.