



Interview Summary

This set of notes summarizes major themes heard in interviews through March 2009. They are not necessarily in order of priority, however items at the top of the list were themes expressed repeatedly.

Issues

What are the most important issues facing Wheat Ridge that the plan should address?

- **Financial Element.** The plan needs to be based on financial realities; the 2000 Plan did not address that. The city relies heavily on sales tax, especially from grocery stores and retaining the existing stores and sources of revenue is extremely important. The city is facing a widening gap between revenues and expenses and has a long list of unfunded capital improvement projects.
- **Business/Economic Development.** The plan can help define Wheat Ridge's Economic strategy although a number of organizations in the community are charged with addressing economic development. In terms of land use, the discussion in the past has been fairly centered on retail, but this discussion may need to broaden into a more integrated strategy (i.e., retail, primary jobs, or both and their relationship to housing). The plan should address where and how the community wants to attract businesses, what kind, and in what sequence. An Economic Development Strategy should spell out the difference and roles between Wheat Ridge 2020, the Urban Renewal Authority, and the City's Economic Development programs. It should also determine the markets and what's left to capture in Wheat Ridge (e.g., Junior "Big Boxes"?) When the economy turns around, the city needs to have targeted sites and be ready to be more aggressive. The Wheat Ridge market is challenging because of blight, assemblage complexities, basic market forces, fear of being "first-in", and limited commercial credit.
 - **Commercial expansion opportunities are on the west side.** 1-70/Kipling or Cabelas Site—either one but probably not both.
 - **Exempla Lutheran.** The hospital is doing a \$225 million renovation, which makes it likely they will continue to be an important member of Wheat Ridge and its economy. There is potential for less expensive office space outside their fence for medical offices. The hospital would like to see more nearby hotels, retails, and full service restaurants to serve its staff. Opportunities for long-term land assemblage may exist outside the fence (the hospital has focused internally).
 - **Role of continuing care facilities.** The community has a need for senior providers. Some facilities target the lower income and scale that Wheat Ridge population can support, but not many.

- **Flex Space and offices.** Demand for flex space / high tech buildings exists, according to Jefferson Economic Council. The county needs another high tech center for it to remain competitive. The region has a strong high tech base, particularly in renewable energy, biotech, and aerospace. Local business had been expanding. The plan can explore whether Wheat Ridge can contribute to that regional need.
 - **Primary jobs versus retail.** The plan should explore the appropriate balance between attracting needed retail sales and retention / expansion of “primary jobs”.
- **Redevelopment around Commercial Corridors.** The plan can help establish a coordinated, strategic approach to key redevelopment corridors. Commercial corridor properties are not deep enough to support successful redevelopment, so the plan should strategically address opportunities for corridors to be widened into adjacent areas while avoiding changes to “stable” neighborhoods. The relationship of transportation improvements with redevelopment corridors will also be important to address.
- **Density, Design, and Height.** The plan needs to balance protection of neighborhood character with its ability to facilitate orderly growth and redevelopment. Therefore, the plan needs to address the height and density limits in the City Charter. The 2000 Plan expressed support for “no” density citywide, but most interviewees now recognize limitations of that approach. The plan update should address how to maintain the “rural feel” in some areas (e.g., lack of curbs, gutters, and sidewalks), while identifying places where higher density is appropriate, such as near commercial uses. It should also clearly define corridors and neighborhood low density areas. The Charter density and height issue will continue to be controversial, but there seems to be some level of comfort that certain commercial areas are appropriate for change and that the city needs to reposition itself, as presented in the Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy (NRS).
- **Neighborhoods.** Wheat Ridge is a city of neighborhoods. One of its strengths is the eclectic and diverse quality of the single family neighborhoods and housing and the lack of “cookie cutter” subdivisions. The plan should preserve and enhance these neighborhoods and address how to prevent conversion to rental properties.
- **Single Family Housing and Housing Stock.** The plan can help determine the existing housing stock and potential (e.g., number of multi family, duplexes, paired housing). Many residential properties are narrow but deep. Single family, ranch style houses are the predominant style, and could be one of the city’s major strengths. Homes are small but affordable. Perhaps the smaller ranch style housing will be appealing to seniors.
- **City’s Assets:** Wheat Ridge is “convenient to everywhere.” The city is a short commute to Denver and is convenient to I-70 and the mountains. It has good transportation, a great parks and open space system, lots of trees (contributing to healthy air), and great neighborhoods that are not like everywhere else. Residential properties have large lots and relaxed living, and some neighborhoods have a “country feel.” Multiple generations live in the city, contributing to community pride.
- **Connected, Green Infrastructure.** The open space network along Clear Creek is one of the city’s major assets. The plan should identify how to leverage assets near Clear Creek, including a connected nature trail system.
- **Strategic Land Use Plan.** The 2000 Plan focused on parcel-by-parcel detail. Consider making this plan more descriptive, criteria-based, and strategic rather than highly

detailed and parcel-based. In addition, a realistic comprehensive plan should address the mismatch between existing land uses, zoning, and future land uses and how to implement necessary change. It should also be conscious of the relationship between transportation and land use.

- **Level of Service/Standards**. The plan should address provision of services and facilities with new development (e.g., police, fire, water, parks, and trails). It needs to address the fiscal impact of policies, development, and annexation. The fragmented district approach to services has always been a challenge in the community.
- **Sustainability**. Usually Wheat Ridge addresses sustainability as a financial issue. Several interviewees expressed interest in broadening the definition to encompass environment, energy, higher density housing, climate change, health, walkability, and other topics.
- **Transit-Oriented Development**. The plan should address the anticipated light rail (Gold Line station) and long-term opportunities there for mixed use, denser development.
- **Implementation**. Implementation always lags behind plan policies. The plan should discuss in detail what to do to make it work.
- **Capital Improvement Plan**. The city needs to focus more on “brick and mortar” projects. The plan can help identify priorities.
- **Basic Infrastructure**. City needs basic storm sewer and sidewalks in some locations. The plan should address what is needed and where.
- **Walkability**. The NRS identified neighborhood nodes and small commercial centers. This plan should address sidewalks and connectivity, especially to key nodes and centers.
- **Town Center**. The plan should continue to explore whether the community needs a town center? If so, where should it be located (e.g., along 38th or along 44th?)
- **Schools**. The plan should address how the city and school district can partner to improve under-performing schools and plan for the future.
- **Crime/Public Safety**. Have crime rates increased? The plan should explore how to address known “hot spots” (e.g., around Fruitdale park)?
- **Code Enforcement**. Many of the interviewees acknowledged that the city is getting run down and more needs to be done to address code enforcement. The plan should address how to deal with the appearance of areas that are becoming run down, particularly in areas with high rental rates.
- **Rental Registration**. Conversion of single family areas to rentals raises questions about how to address property maintenance and public safety. Consider renter or rental housing registration.
- **Fire Protection**. No major issues were raised regarding current fire protection. The Mutual aid agreement has improved the response time north of Clear Creek.
- **Domestic Animals**. The ability to have horses, cows, chickens is a sacred right for some people in the community. The plan should not change that ability.
- **Predictability/Development Review/Permit Fees**. Predictability in the development review process and fees is needed. The NRS recommended predictability. The city should continue to evaluate development review time frames and compare its processes with other communities. Permit fees need to be fair and comparable to surrounding communities too.

- **Industrial Areas and I-70 Opportunities**. The plan should evaluate and address the role of large industrial and commercial properties, and retain these zoning districts.
- **Demographics**. Wheat Ridge has a large senior population and a number of people living below the poverty line. These are challenging populations to serve. The plan should address how to provide senior assisted living (which the market would likely support). The model has to be appropriate for the community. People should have the opportunity to “live their whole life in Wheat Ridge,” even as they age and need support.
- **Retail Needed in East**. The East End of the community has changed a lot since 2000. Newer residents would like to see more retail opportunities there.

Current Plans and Regulations (“What’s Broken?”)

Are you familiar with any of the current plans or studies or regulations? (e.g., NRS Plan.) What are deficiencies or strengths? What should the city carry forward?

- **The 2000 Comprehensive Plan**: The 2000 Plan did not include a financial or business element and is a bit of an isolationist document. It did include a very detailed parcel-by-parcel analysis of land use, although the Future Plan largely reflected existing uses.
- **The Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy (NRS)**: The NRS pointed out deficiencies of the 2000 Plan and its isolationist views. It also recommended stronger leadership and coordination. It suggested providing housing options and a diversity of choices beyond just single family. It did not focus as much on commercial corridors, but those are extremely important. That plan was very specific in the Fruitdale area, leading to the subarea plan.

Public Participation

What do you believe will be the most effective way to get the Wheat Ridge community involved in the planning process? How can we best involve you and/or your organization or group?

Methods:

- Some afternoon meetings for seniors; tap into Silver Sneakers programs at Recreation Center.
- Surveys.
- Channel 8 (Charrettes could be filmed and played).
- High School Civics Class event.
- At Churches (e.g., LDS, Peter and Paul, Harvest Christian).
- Need connections with paper – to “Blow Horn”.
- Piggy back onto neighborhood meetings with Councilors and Quarterly Legislator meetings.
- Make meetings interactive with maps.
- Word of mouth.
- Safeway (information).
- Sam’s barber shop.
- Email lists.
- Website links (Historic Society, other orgs).

- Fliers.

Involve the following people and organizations:

- Economic Council – Jefferson County (on the technical group)
- Denver West Business District (some of businesses are in this organization)
- Businesses: Med Ved, Ketelsen RVs/Campers and long-time commercial property owners.
- Historic Society (200 members) meets 2nd Tuesday of the month.
- United Neighbors.
- Board of Adjustment. The board sees what works and doesn't related to redevelopment.
- URA – The Authority might have ideas about opportunities (e.g., Wadsworth/38th)
- Housing Authority.
- Wheat Ridge 2020.
- Building Code Advisory Committee.
- Cultural Commission.
- Optimists Club.

Best Advice

What is the best advice you can give us that will lead to a successful planning process?

- Make sure the Council and Planning Commission have lots of opportunities for real involvement.
- Make the process fair and transparent. Don't have pre-conceived ideas.
- Anticipate needing certain changes, otherwise the outcome won't be what the city wants. NRS was a good step.
- Make options realistic. Use examples (especially related to density). Address redevelopment and style (e.g., people don't like Spanish-style buildings).
- The community has a strong environmental ethic – respect that.
- Show trends occurring in the community; acknowledge cultural changes and needs of citizens.
- Don't get into parcel-by-parcel details; plan should be more criteria-based, descriptive, not quasi-zoning. Make it a strategic plan.