

Arvada City Council Meeting Workshop, August 24, 2015

Notes taken by Susan Shirley

This evening's workshop was attended by Mayor Pro Tem Mark McGoff and Councilmembers Don Allard, Bob Dyer, Bob Fifer, Jerry Marks, and John Marriott. Mayor Marc Williams was detained in court on behalf of a client, and excused by unanimous vote of the other councilmembers. Public attendance was eight.

Topics were a sketch plan review for an Xcel Energy Substation to service the Candelas/Leyden Rock area, and an annual update of the Forward Jeffco Initiative.

Moon Gulch Substation:

A lot more than housing is underway for the Candelas area. Charlie McKay's Church Ranch Companies is the commercial developer which plans a town center, to include office and retail as well as hoped-for data centers. At the moment, the area's electrical needs are provided by the Simms and Eldorado substations, which are four and seven miles away, respectively. These substations will not be adequate for the anticipated uses, and Xcel is exploring options for an on-site substation at the intersection of Highway 72 and the Candelas Parkway. The proposal presented at this workshop was reviewed by the Planning Commission at a July, 2015 workshop. The Planning Commission asked Xcel to address safety and health concerns, as well as possible problems arising from the visual impact of the substation.

Another problem to be dealt with is zoning. According to Director of Community Development Rita McConnell, minor utilities are allowed in any zoning district, but a major utility use such as a substation is only allowable under I-2 zoning. Councilmember Allard considers this "spot zoning," which Council has generally agreed not to use. However, McConnell said that, as the next update of the Land Development Code may have major utilities included in PUD-BPR (Planned Unit Development, Business/Professional/Residential) her department is comfortable with the legality of changing the zoning now to allow the substation.

The substation will have a total of three 230 kilovolt transformers, with one going online right away and the other two being added as needed. Those transformers are 33' x 19' x 20' tall. There will be associated equipment to go with those, and a 1,344 square foot control building. This should be up and running by 2019. Xcel has identified a 4.3 acre site adjacent to existing transmission lines. Xcel plans berming, landscaping, improvements to trails and sidewalks, and an iron and masonry fence. There will also be mitigation of extremely low frequency (ELF) magnetic fields, so that a person standing a foot away from the property line would be exposed to less ELF magnetic field than they would at the same distance from a toaster or microwave oven.

The Candelas town center is expected to cover over 232 acres, and the overall size of the Candelas master plan is 1,500 acres.

Councilmember Bob Dyer pointed out that the Simms substation has been in its location for a long time, and at this point people may not even be noticing it's there. He noted the far more unsightly views across the highway, on Jefferson County land. He said, "I appreciate we don't want to look at the requirements our standard of living necessitate," but hopes people might drive along 64th and Simms to have an idea of what a substation's impact might realistically be.

Councilmember Jerry Marks wondered if some of the transmission lines can be located underground. He was told that some of them will be placed underground as the area is developed.

Councilmember John Marriott said he doesn't think Xcel would be applying for a substation if they didn't really need it. He wondered about the footprints and capacities of various substations being about the same. He also noted that it may be impossible to find a location that is optimal for all parties concerned. He said he wouldn't look unfavorably on a transformer site being built near the transmission line.

Councilmember Bob Fifer said he would obviously prefer not to site the station near a main road. He also emphasized the importance of a redundant feed which would be required by any data centers which located in the area. In addition, he said he prefers to have lines underground as much as possible. He was told that that can be made a condition of approval for whoever develops the corner areas of the site. Fifer reiterated that this is a clean slate, and he'd prefer having things done right the first time. The berms would screen the substation from nearby, but for the taller buildings and the people driving at a distance on the highway, it would still be visible. Councilmember Dyer gave his opinion that, until there is development on the nearby county land, the substation will be "one of the better things to look at" in that area.

* * *

Forward Jeffco Initiative

Kevin McCaskey of the Jefferson County Economic Corporation (JCEDC) presented an annual update. The specific focus of the Forward Jeffco Initiative is to attract primary jobs to the area, as well as retaining employers, advocating on behalf of new and existing businesses, coordinating efforts of all the communities in Jefferson County to "create a pipeline of skilled technical workers," and supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses.

There are hopes that western Arvada will soon be home to a new, significant employer, whom McCaskey did not name or otherwise describe.

Target industries for primary jobs are aerospace, aviation, bioscience, outdoor recreation, energy, and a new category, food and beverage, which particularly means craft beer and distilleries.

The five-year initiative (2013 - 2018) includes the stated goal of creating 3,000 new jobs by the end of 2015; there have been over 4,800 jobs "created and retained," which is not broken down into the number of each.

Another goal is to increase the number of investors, which is now at 85 out of a five-year goal of 120. In 2015, JCEDC conducted a survey of the available land in the county which could be used for industries. They have also convened industry roundtables, to find out what can be done to create a better business environment. McCaskey said the concerns often include workforce issues, which will increase as many workers retire. JCEDC is working with higher education institutions on developing apprentice programs, to be tailored to the specific needs of the area's industries.

* * *

City Manager Mark Deven said that this was the last workshop until September 14th, and that there will be no meeting next week because it is the fifth Monday of the month. There will also be no meeting on September 7th because of the Labor Day holiday.

The September 14 workshop will be on the topic of the budget and capital improvement projects. Deven also said that the Denver Water Board would like to schedule ongoing meetings. Councilmember Allard said he would also like a tour of the Gross Reservoir site.

The workshop was adjourned at 7:15.