

Arvada City Council Meeting, August 25, 2014

Notes taken by Susan Shirley

All councilmembers were present: Mayor Marc Williams, Mayor Pro Tem Mark McGoff, and Councilmembers Don Allard, Bob Dyer, Bob Fifer, Jerry Marks, and John Marriott.

Attendance by citizens was 3.

This meeting centered around two topics: branding and graphics standards for the City, and the Healthy Places Initiative.

Communications Manager Maria VanderKolk began with an overview of branding. She returned to Arvada in April of this year and began working on the City's initiative to rebrand itself, which is one of the items in the Strategic Business Plan. Speaking with City Manager Mark Deven and the leadership team to determine their intent, it appeared they wanted to scrap everything and start from scratch. VanderKolk says that vision has now been modified.

To begin, said VanderKolk, let's look at the terms involved: logo, slogan, and brand, all of which are used by corporations and cities in defining their identities.

A logo is the visual symbol used to identify a product; think Golden Arches, Nike Swoosh, Safeway "S".

A slogan, or tagline, is a memorable phrase meant to be associated with the specific brand: When You Care Enough To Send the Very Best. Finger Lickin' Good. Just Do It.

A brand is the emotional and psychological relationship between a company and its consumers. The example VanderKolk used was the word "NORDSTROM" on the screen. What comes to mind with Nordstrom, she said, is top-of-the-line customer service. That is their brand. You hear "Nordstrom," and you think "great customer service." Sometimes rebranding happens in response to negative consumer association with a company. Arvada is fortunate in not having negative associations to overcome; VanderKolk pointed out that ten people would give ten different answers to the question of what Arvada means to them, but those answers would be overwhelmingly positive.

Arvada's logo, the hexagonal "A", was designed in 1971 by a local architect, who was not named in this discussion. Then, in 1993, the Parade of Homes included West Woods in their tour, and Arvada adopted the motto "City of the Arts." Signs were places around town, but the motto eventually fizzled.

Over the years, different signage, fonts, colors, and mountain backgrounds have been used. The tens of thousands of street signs were replaced in a long term project completed about eight or ten years ago.

Now, the question is, should the logo be replaced? Is it tired, or iconic? And is there a third option, between leaving things as-is, or sending everything to the scrap heap and starting new?

The cost of scrapping would of course be very high. The logo is everywhere. VanderKolk spoke with a representative of every Arvada department, and the consensus was not to change the logo, but to make the graphics more uniform across uses and departments. The reddish "mountainscape" stickers, such as are seen on some police vehicles, would also be phased out over time.

For branding, the question might be, Do we even need a brand? Arvada is not, and may never be, a big city. It is a suburb. It also lacks symbolic architecture, said VanderKolk, such as the Eiffel Tower, which instantly says Paris and romance.

Something recently come to light is the fact that residents of Candelas and Leyden Rock don't necessarily consider themselves Arvadans. That is something that can also be addressed as part of the rebranding discussion.

VanderKolk recommends submitting a request for proposals to some rebranding firms just to see what the cost would be, but for now to only work on the phasing-in of more consistency in the graphics. She also said that any rebranding would happen with the assistance and participation of the community.

Councilmember John Marriott said that he was in Wheat Ridge when the rebranding was done. The changes were small, but the complaints were many. Marriott said that is a sign that that type of change brings forward a lot of emotion, and he cautioned VanderKolk to tread lightly. He said the old logo may have served its purpose; to him it is the weakest part of Arvada's presentation. He said he thinks the gateway signs to Olde Town are spectacular, and he thinks continuing that idea around the city would pay big dividends. Marriott said we should either do the whole deal, all new, or just the clean-up of the graphics, which he said would be worthwhile although not a true "rebranding."

Councilmember Bob Fifer said the hexagonal "A" is recognizable in many other places. He added that he likes the saying "City and Community of Arvada," which has received compliments at the Colorado Municipal League, and says that is our image, a sense of community. He would like to see more emphasis on that.

Councilmember Don Allard gave his opinion that we might not even need a brand. He pointed out that when Arvadans travel to other areas of the country, we identify ourselves as being from a suburb of Denver.

Councilmember Bob Dyer agreed that the graphics need to get under control. With respect to branding, his opinion is that branding is a manifestation of reality. He said, "I don't think Nordstrom said, 'we provide great customer service' and then that became their brand;" but rather, the great customer service was there, and now that is what people associate with Nordstrom. It's a perception based on the experience of millions of shoppers.

Dyer continued, saying the brand will take care of itself--Boulder doesn't seem to have deliberately done a "brand," yet everyone knows about Boulder and its attributes. However, Dyer does think it would be worth promoting awareness of some of the notable people who are from here or who have decided to make Arvada their home, and why.

The general consensus of the remaining Councilmembers was the same--keep the logo, simplify what is in place now, get the proposals but don't commit a lot of money at this point.

VanderKolk pointed out one advantage to branding occurs in efforts to attract businesses and employees to Arvada; it's good to be able to distinguish ourselves from all the other suburbs in a positive way.

Councilmember Dyer responded to that by saying one of the things that makes us unique, but not in a good way, is that we are the only suburb of this size, maybe in the whole country, not to have a hotel. Another attribute is "you can't get there from here," because so many roads don't connect. He summed up by saying, "We're a SUBURB--just let it lie."

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The Healthy Places Initiative was discussed next, by Coordinator Rose Chavez.

This initiative began with a \$1 million, three-year grant in November of 2013. The idea is to help cities adopt and implement policies promoting better nutrition and more exercise. Efforts here in Arvada are mainly focused on the southeast area, which is the lowest-income part of the city, with no nearby commercial gyms or public recreation centers.

Some of the solutions for the residents of the area are greater connectivity of sidewalks, bike lanes, bike racks, upgrades to parks and play equipment, and a "walking school bus." Chavez said there has been an effort to promote walking and biking as safe and enjoyable. The Healthy Places Initiative workers have attended festivals and other local events to interview citizens; they have gone door-to-door to establish connections with residents of the southeast part of town, and have held neighborhood meetings. Surveys will continue until mid-September, with about one thousand surveys having been returned to date.

Councilmember Mark McGoff congratulated workers on a fine job so far. He asked Chavez if there has been outreach on the east side of Sheridan. She said that the response there was the most robust of all.

Councilmember Bob Fifer asked about the bike racks, saying he really hopes they are placed where they will not add to the levels of congestion already present on many of the Olde Town sidewalks. He was assured that Streetscapes, Inc., the contractor responsible for the placement, will be mindful of that problem. Fifer also said he is concerned about the idea of turning on more porch lights in an attempt to make walking safer after dark. He said we need to think about light pollution. He also expressed surprise that, although he believes we have safe neighborhoods here, more than fifty percent of the respondents to the survey put a high priority on improved safety.

Councilmember John Marriott thanked Chavez for the solid and good use of grant funds. He said that wishes for an outdoor pool come up "at every turn," and that if grants were available for that, it would be really great.

City Manager Mark Deven said that three things have contributed to the City being engaged with its neighborhoods to what might be the greatest degree, ever: the change to sector-based policing, the Healthy Places Initiative, and the new Block Party trailer; all these things, he said, are very positive and have brought about real connections between the City and its citizens.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10.