

## Parking and traffic issues drive discussion at Niwot LID November meeting

By Jocelyn Rowley Editorial@lhvc.com Nov 11, 2016

Several transportation projects are on tap for the Niwot area in 2017, and additional downtown parking may be one step closer to reality. That's what the Advisory Committee to the Niwot Local Improvement District (LID) heard from George Gerstle, Boulder County's Director of Transportation, who spoke at the Committee's Nov. 1 meeting. The LID also approved funding for two projects, got an update on negotiations with BNSF, and finalized details of an upcoming Strategic Plan Update meeting scheduled for later this month.

The meeting was called to order promptly at 7 p.m. Committee member Carrie Wise, acting on behalf of Pat Murphy, presented the evening's first funding request, for expenses related to the Great Pumpkin Party, Niwot's annual Halloween event. This year's Party, held on Oct. 29, included a parade, hayrides and a petting zoo. The request of \$2,074 was approved unanimously.

Committee members who attended this year's Pumpkin Party reported larger than average turnout, aided, no doubt, by the unseasonably warm weather.

"It was by far the best ever," committee member Tony Santelli said. "There were crowds everywhere."

Wise agreed, noting she nearly ran out of candy for trick-or-treaters.

The committee next considered a written request from Niwot Prairie Productions for \$1,900 to pay Eddie Running Wolf for the completion of Cheyenne Holy Man, the third piece of the Sculpture Park. At last month's meeting, Mike Anfinson of NPP informed the LID that the sculpture was complete, but as of yet, no formal installation or dedication for the piece has been scheduled. The committee also approved this request unanimously.

Moving on to new business, the LID asked Gerstle for an update on various traffic and transportation concerns confronting Niwot residents.

First, he addressed the most recent parking utilization study for Niwot, a topic foremost in the minds of committee members. The study, conducted in August and September of this year, showed lower than expected parking utilization rates, and concluded that the town had not met the triggers defined in the 2011 Connectivity Study that would prompt action from Boulder County.

Gerstle fielded several questions from committee members about the report's assumptions and definitions, and provided supplemental data collected during the study. A spirited discussion followed.

"Parking is a critical success factor for Niwot," Santelli said, who is also President of the Niwot Business Association (NBA). He urged the county to take immediate action, despite the utilization shortfall.

"We want to get ahead of the curve. If we wait for the trigger, it's already too late," he concluded.

Wise agreed, and further noted that the Connectivity Study also has a "development" trigger that prompts action to increase parking when a significant new business, such as 1914 House, moves to town.

Gerstle said the county recognizes the growing need for parking in Niwot, and will begin the process of reviewing and revising Land Use codes in the Niwot Rural Community District to allow for more parking. Land Use Director Dale Case has added evaluation of Niwot parking requirements to his department's work plan for the first quarter of 2017.

Gerstle also announced two major transportation projects slated for the Niwot area in 2017.

On Nov. 9, the county will hold an open house to present updated plans for reconstruction of North 83rd St. between Niwot Road and the Diagonal Highway, including replacement of the culvert at Dry Creek #2 and repaving of Neva Rd. between 83rd Street and 5th Avenue. Construction will begin next year, and is expected to be completed in 2018.

The Boulder County Transportation Department has also received funding to construct railroad "Quiet Zones" along the Diagonal Highway corridor, including at the Monarch, Niwot Rd., 2nd Ave., and 83rd St. crossings. The County is hosting a public meeting on Dec. 7 at Niwot Elementary School to discuss changes to these intersections, which will include a question and answer session.

Before departing, Gerstle also mentioned that the county has applied for a CDOT Safe Routes to School grant. If awarded, the county will use the funds to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to Niwot Elementary. He also told the LID that RTD will be implementing rapid transit improvements along the Diagonal beginning in 2021.

Moving on to old business, Julie Ankenbrandt, NBA marketing director and LID economic development director, updated the committee on ongoing efforts by the NBA to acquire land in the northwest end of town for use as a public parking lot.

To date, negotiations with property's owner, the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), have stalled due to a disagreement over the tract's valuation. According to Ankenbrandt, the BNSF real estate department has now agreed to review a reappraisal of the property, which the NBA hopes to have concluded by the end of this month.

Pete Salas, Boulder County's liaison to the LID, announced that the Strategic Plan Update meeting will be held Monday, Nov. 14 at the Niwot Inn.

The LID will meet next on Dec. 6 at 7 p.m. at the Niwot Fire Station.