

## March 23 2021 NEPPIDAC Meeting Minutes

Present:

NEPPIDAC members:

- Vera Schulte-Pelkum
- Shirin Chahal
- Karen Blakemore
- Tania Corvalan
- Vacant member-at-large

Staff:

- Alex Hyde-Wright, Boulder County
  - Miranda Fisher, Town of Nederland
  - Karen Gerrity, Town of Nederland
- 
- Hyde-Wright welcomed Karen Blakemore, new appointee to NEPPIDAC.
  - Blakemore stated she is on Planning Commission, and Vision 2030/ Environmental Sustainability.
  - Hyde-Wright: 4 members of NEPPIDAC appointed by Boulder County Commissioners, 5<sup>th</sup> member is selected by Town of Nederland BoT, from among their members.

Agenda Item #3: EcoPass utilization and ballot options

- Hyde-Wright presented overview of financial history of the EcoPass district: property tax revenue, EcoPass contract pricing, switch to utilization-based pricing in 2019, and COVID-19 ridership impacts. Without COVID, were facing EcoPass contract price of \$350k-400k. With COVID, 2022 contract price will likely be around \$162k. Unknown how quickly ridership will rebound, and thus how quickly EcoPass contract price will increase in last few years of existing mill levy.
- Mill levy ends in 2023, to continue program beyond that need to go back to voters.
- Blakemore: How does utilization-based pricing impact other EcoPass programs:
  - Hyde-Wright: by and large, contract prices are going up. Pre-covid, most NECO programs were facing steep increases. Some City of Boulder programs ended. Programs that continued needed to figure out how to collect more money. Nederland program is one of few programs funded by designated tax/fund. No programs have any bargaining power with RTD. Each program's price is entirely dependent on its own utilization
- Gerrity: What was margin of approval for 2013 ballot measure?
  - Hyde-Wright: 54/45 approval. 1500 total ballots cast
- Schulte-Pelkum: Assuming RTD's financial situation is fluid.
  - Hyde-Wright: yes. Lots of federal lifelines at play, but sales tax (65% of total revenue) has taken big hit. Farebox revenue (20% of total revenue) also took a big hit.
- Schulte-Pelkum: How long will Sat schedule for NB be in place?

- Hyde-Wright: CRSSA funding was to keep people employed, help transit agencies with operations. Will be runboard changes in June and Sept 2021. No indication when additional service will be coming to NB. Currently no overloads on NB route. RTD being conservative with service restoration.
- Schulte-Pelkum: Are there more drastic options on the table at RTD? Cutting routes, etc.?
  - Hyde-Wright: RTD's new GM/CEO Debra Johnson agrees that RTD fares are too high. But keep in mind lower fares means less revenue for RTD. Later this year, RTD will begin process to revisit fares and pass programs. EcoPass pricing structure could change before our mill levy runs out. Most likely, more significant cuts to service are not coming.
- Schulte-Pelkum: voters in 2021 would be voting on very unknown level of service going forward
- Schulte-Pelkum: What's going on with CU's student program, related to utilization pricing?
- Hyde-Wright presented options for when to return to voters with mill levy extension, in either 2021, 2022 or 2023
- Schulte-Pelkum: If we wait until 2023, and ballot measure fails, could we reinstate later? If we had a successful ballot measure in 2023 or 2025?
  - Hyde-Wright: EcoPass contract is only for 1 year at a time. Can end/restart as you'd like. Doesn't really matter to RTD.
- Schulte-Pelkum: If program lapses and restarts, could we use same passes?
  - Hyde-Wright: unknown
- Schulte-Pelkum: Any recent examples of unsuccessful ballot measure that came back and was later approved:
  - Gerrity: Maybe one with the science levy. But that program didn't lapse.
- Schulte-Pelkum: going to voters with less information could poison the well
  - Gerrity: probably don't want to be on ballot same time as countywide transportation sales tax. Tough choices.
  - Hyde-Wright: don't need to pick between all three options right now. Right now we are deciding fall 2021 or not
- Blakemore: Would countywide fare free transit include Denver/DIA or just within Boulder County?
  - Hyde-Wright: 2 options for fare free transit: Give EcoPasses to all residents. Can use your pass anywhere in the RTD district. Admin burden might be insurmountable. Other option: Farebox buy-up. Admin is much easier, but can't take your "pass" with you outside of the program area.
- Blakemore: Average home value in district is \$400k. EcoPass mill levy is \$55/ year. Post covid ridership likely to rebound in fall 2021. Makes sense to wait for 2023 before going back to voters. See what county does in 2022.
  - Hyde-Wright: lots of uncertainty now. Won't have more info in time to go to voters in Nov 2021.
- Corvalan: How much are residents paying right now?
  - Blakemore: Each homeowner paying \$55/ year. Due to cover full utilization cost, would need to increase to ~\$150/ household/ year. Property taxes depend on value of your property/home.

- Schulte-Pelkum: Asking people to triple this property tax when service levels are down or flat is a tough sell.
- Blakemore: environmental benefits are a selling point, even for people who don't ride the bus. If RTD offers discount for EcoPass in future, might not need to go to voters with an increase in taxes.
- Schulte-Pelkum: during covid, peak ridership decreased, but essential workers kept riding.
- Schulte-Pelkum: trend is towards less regional bus service. How does the NB factor within a countywide program?
  - Hyde-Wright: NB, Y, BOLT, J were the regional routes that remained within Boulder County. NB fares would not make or break budget for countywide fare free system
- Blakemore: Safety is another selling point for NB
  
- **Recommendation from NEPPIDAC: Motion: we are not ready to go to voters for property tax extension in 2021.**
  - Schulte-Pelkum moved. Blakemore seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
  
- Gerrity: Unlikely we'd be going to voters for transportation projects, except for possible debt authority for another TIP project
- Schulte-Pelkum: Are we partnering with Eldora in some way?
  - Gerrity: They are trying to expand their parking capacity.
  - Hyde-Wright: Had some elements they implemented winter before covid. Other aspects put on hold during covid (charging for parking on weekends and powder days). Eldora was providing extra buses last winter.
- Blakemore: If we didn't have EcoPass, would we have lower ridership, and be at more risk of losing service?
  - Hyde-Wright: yes.
  - Schulte-Pelkum: increased ridership by 40% when program began.
- Blakemore: What happened in Lyons?
  - Hyde-Wright: Y suspended in April 2020, but EcoPass program continuing.
- Blakemore: EcoPass District does not include Eldora, correct?
  - Hyde-Wright: True, but program is for residents only. Does not currently include employees.
- Blakemore: currently, businesses are paying property tax, but their employees don't get passes.
  - Hyde-Wright: To add employees, would have two contracts with RTD (City of Boulder district uses this model). Don't know costs to add employees at this moment. Business rules/pricing are totally separate.
  - Schulte-Pelkum: You have to administer program yourself. Can't offload admin to RTD.
- Blakemore: How can we put onus more on passholders and less on town staff?
  - Hyde-Wright: we are moving towards this system for renters. Easier for town to track homeowners