

IN THE LOOP WITH NANCY

March 2026

Newsletter from Colorado Springs City Councilmember Nancy Henjum

Happy spring to all District 5 friends and neighbors! I'm so glad to connect with you through this edition of my newsletter. Each month, I share updates on city projects, events you can join, resources for residents, and stories from around our community.

Grateful to serve,

Nancy

Councilmember, District 5 - Colorado Springs

Boulder Street and Palmer High School: My Vote, My Reasoning, and What Comes Next



Construction underway at Palmer High School where D11s renovation project prompted important questions about safety, traffic and the future of Boulder Street

A recent City Council decision regarding the permanent closure of Boulder Street has generated significant community conversation. The proposal was part of School District 11's plan to renovate Palmer High School, and I have heard thoughtful feedback from many directions. Some constituents have concerns about the closure. Others feel genuine excitement for the vision of a unified Palmer campus. Both responses reflect something important: our community cares deeply about Palmer, and so do I.

After careful consideration, I voted against the vacation of the city right of way (a.k.a. permanent closure) of Boulder Street. I want to share my reasoning with you and to be clear that this is not the end of Palmer's story. Palmer's best days can still lie ahead. The proposal failed on a tie vote of 4/4 with one councilmember recusing himself.

My Connection to Palmer

For 35 years, Palmer has been home to my family. My husband Steve taught there for 25 years, retiring in 2017. Our children received a world-class education at Palmer, and I'm proud that our grandchildren now live within the Palmer attendance area. Since joining City Council in 2021, I've had the pleasure of meeting regularly with Palmer's student council, and those conversations about leadership and civic life are among the highlights of this role. As Palmer marks its 150th anniversary this year, I'm proud of its legacy and genuinely excited about what is possible.

Why I Voted No

Two issues gave me serious pause.

Student Safety and Parking. The proposed plan would eliminate hundreds of student parking spaces. District 11 acknowledged in their Council presentation that students who drive would need to rely on street parking. In practice, that means many students parking further north and east of campus and crossing streets without signals or pedestrian walkways. As someone who passes Palmer every day on my commute to City Hall, I find that prospect genuinely concerning. The plan did not adequately address this safety gap.

The proposed relocation of the track and field also raised concerns. Placing a track at street level immediately adjacent to Nevada Avenue, a major high-traffic corridor, introduces new safety challenges that were not satisfactorily addressed.

Fiscal Uncertainty. The full renovation plan is not currently funded. While the District has resources to build the track and field over Boulder Street, a future bond vote would be required to fund the proposed gymnasium. I cannot support permanently vacating city property, a decision that cannot be easily undone, based on the hope that future funding will materialize. As a Council member, I must weigh what is known today.

What I Heard From You

Many constituents told me they felt unheard, first by District leadership, and then by City Council. I want you to know: I hear that. And I believe it means we must keep talking.

A Path Forward

City Council's vote does not send the Palmer renovation back to square one. During the design phase, District 11 explored several concepts that would concentrate new facilities on adjacent blocks, including creative approaches for navigating Boulder Street. Many who spoke in opposition to the closure also voiced support for those alternatives. It is time to return to those options.

I'm committed to being part of continued conversations that keep student safety, effective traffic management, neighborhood priorities, and fiscal responsibility at the center. Palmer's community deserves nothing less.

Related: Have Your Say on the City's Transportation Safety Action Plan

Speaking of street safety and traffic concerns, the City has developed a draft Transportation Safety Action Plan (SAP) to reduce serious and fatal crashes for all roadway users—drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists. Funded by a \$280,000 federal Safe Streets for All grant, the plan identifies specific strategies and projects to make our roads safer.

The draft plan and a new crash data dashboard are both open for public comment **through Thursday, April 2, 2026**. You can review the draft plan and leave comments directly on the document, and submit feedback on the dashboard through a separate form. Adoption of the final plan is targeted for May 2026.

This is especially relevant given the student safety and traffic concerns I raised in my Boulder Street vote above. I encourage all residents to share their input. Learn more and provide feedback at [ColoradoSprings.gov/SafetyActionPlan](https://coloradosprings.gov/SafetyActionPlan).



Civility in Action: Learning Townhall on City Council Agendas

One of my deepest commitments as your Councilmember is making sure that civic life is accessible to everyone, not just those who already know how it works. That's why I'm excited to co-host a Learning Townhall with Councilmember Kimberly Gold and Legislative Services Staff on Thursday, March 26. This session is designed to help residents understand how to read and navigate a City Council meeting agenda, so you can show up informed and engaged. Whether you're new to following Council or a longtime observer who has always wanted to understand the process better, this event is for you. No prior knowledge required.



Date: Thursday, March 26, 2026

Time: 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Location: Colorado Springs City Hall, 3rd Floor, Council Chambers

Address: 107 N Nevada Ave

Phone: 719-385-5986

Website: [ColoradoSprings.gov/CityCouncil](https://coloradosprings.gov/CityCouncil)

I also want to share something I've been thinking about as I do this work. I've just started reading [The Soul of Civility](#) and I find myself thinking about it as I navigate the work of public service. It was gifted to all City Council members by the organization [Reclaiming Civility](#). They offer practical tools for fostering respect, navigating disagreement, and rebuilding trust in our communities. Events like the one referenced below offer opportunities for learning, asking questions, and engaging constructively with the local government.

If this resonates with you, please also mark your calendar for a remarkable event at the end of the month:

Civility in the City - Featuring Maury Giles and Alexandra Hudson

Reclaiming Civility, sponsored by UCCS, is hosting a public discussion on courageous citizenship and incivility in public forums, featuring Maury Giles, CEO of Braver Angels, and bestselling author Alexandra Hudson.

Date: Monday, March 30, 2026

Doors open: 6:30 PM

Location: Berger Hall, UCCS Campus

RSVP: [Register here](#)

How Does the City Fund What It Does? Special Taxing Districts and Tax Increment Financing

One of the most important - and least understood - areas of local government is how the city finances public infrastructure and community development without drawing solely on the general fund. At a recent City Council session, we received an in-depth presentation on two powerful tools: Tax Increment Financing (TIF) through Urban Renewal, and Special and Metropolitan Districts.

I encourage every engaged resident to [watch the full video presentation](#). The accompanying slide deck is also available [here](#).

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Urban Renewal

TIF works through a concept called a "virtuous cycle." When an Urban Renewal Area is established, the existing assessed property value is frozen as a baseline. As redevelopment occurs and property values rise, the new tax revenue above that baseline - the "increment" - is captured and reinvested directly back into that same area to pay for infrastructure. More investment generates more increment, which funds more improvement.

Colorado Springs currently has 20 Urban Renewal Plan Areas. The city's Urban Renewal Authority has an independent 13-member board and extensive experience negotiating with other taxing bodies, including school districts and counties, which must now consent to participate in TIF arrangements.

It's worth noting what Urban Renewal is and is not legally authorized for. Colorado statute ties it specifically to the elimination of slum and blight. It is not, by law, a job creation or economic development tool, even though the downstream effects often include both.

Special and Metropolitan Districts

Special and Metro Districts are governmental entities - political subdivisions of the State - authorized to finance, construct, own, operate, and maintain public infrastructure. They can fund streets, parks, water systems, fire protection, transportation improvements, and more. They levy property taxes (subject to TABOR and mill levy caps) and can issue bonds, but their debt is not the City's debt.

Colorado Springs adopted a Special District Policy in 2022 that sets clear boundaries: a maximum debt mill levy of 50 mills, a maximum 40-year imposition term for residential districts, and required public disclosure. Once formed, districts are largely self-governing with elected boards, though the City retains oversight tools through service plans and intergovernmental agreements.

Why This Matters

Both tools were described in the presentation as “value neutral”. Every city decides whether and how to use them. The presentation was offered pro-bono to the city by a firm who does extensive work with these financing and governance models. It is important that we as a community think critically about how they play out in practice.

There are real benefits. TIF and metro districts allow growth to pay for itself. Infrastructure gets built without tapping the general fund. Private investment drives the revenue that covers public improvement costs. For a city operating under TABOR's constraints on revenue growth, these tools have made development possible that might not have happened otherwise.

But the tensions are real, too. When newer neighborhoods are built through metro districts, they generate their own dedicated revenue for parks, roads, and amenities. Older, established neighborhoods, many of which were built long before metro districts became common, don't have that same dedicated funding stream. Over time, this can create visible disparities in infrastructure quality across the city, not because anyone intended it, but because the financing model itself produces uneven results.

Urban Renewal raises its own equity questions. The “slum and blight” designation that authorizes a TIF area can sometimes feel at odds with the lived experience of the people already there. When redevelopment accelerates in a neighborhood, long-time residents (especially renters) can find themselves priced out of the very community that the investment is meant to improve. The increment may be reinvested locally, but that doesn't always mean the benefits reach the people who were there first.

None of this means these tools are inherently good or bad. It means they require informed oversight, honest conversation about who benefits and who bears the costs, and a willingness to ask hard questions about equity alongside efficiency.

As your Councilmember, my job is to work with my fellow 8 councilmembers to ensure these tools are used with full accountability and in genuine service of our community's priorities, not just in the neighborhoods where investment is already flowing, but across all of District 5 and our city. An informed public is our best check on that.

Additional resources are available through the [Special District Association of Colorado](#) and the [Metro District Education Coalition](#).



Support Local Families Through Project COPE

As spring brings a sense of renewal to our community, many local families are still working to recover from the costs and challenges of winter.

Colorado Springs Utilities' Project COPE continues to provide essential utility payment assistance to individuals and households facing financial emergencies or unexpected crises.

This year, the need remains high. Rising living costs and reduced federal assistance mean that more neighbors are seeking help. In 2025, Project COPE provided more than \$1,500,000 in utility assistance to almost 2,400 families.

Partners like [Pikes Peak United Way](#) report that utility assistance is still one of the top requests coming through the 211 helpline. If you or someone you know could use assistance paying their utilities bill, visit the [Project COPE website](#) to learn more.

If you are able to do so, [consider making a contribution](#) that helps others find stability and a fresh start this spring. Your support stays local and directly helps families keep vital services like electricity, heat, and water connected.

Affordable Housing Spotlight: Artspace Colorado Springs



Good news for our creative community and for affordable housing in downtown Colorado Springs. Artspace Colorado Springs is coming in 2026, offering 51 live/work units along with creative

commercial space and a public art plaza. The project serves artists and creatives earning 60% or lower of Area Median Income, and will also include about 20 artist studios.

Located at 315 Costilla Street, the project grew out of a grassroots effort by the Downtown Development Authority and the Downtown COS Creative District, and has been years in the making. This is exactly the kind of community-rooted affordable housing investment our city needs.

Visit artspacecoloradosprings.com to learn more or apply.

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