

**DRAFT**  
**MINUTES**

**REAP Business Meeting**

February 10, 2022

12:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting ID# 615-031-3051

The monthly meeting of the I-70 Regional Economic Advancement Partnership was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by Chairman Kirk Holwell.

**The following Board Members were present:**

|              |                |                |              |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Jeff Baker   | Wil Chase      | Loretta Daniel | Mark Harding |
| Kirk Holwell | Frank Linnebur | Robin Purdy    | Tom Turrell  |
| Becky Zierer |                |                |              |

**Guests attending were:**

|          |           |                              |
|----------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Angelia  | Baker     | Tri-County Health Dept.      |
| BJ       | Buchmann  | Deer Trail Schools           |
| Kip      | Cheroutes | Reap                         |
| Kendra   | Davis     |                              |
| Matt     | Elvehjem  | High Plains Bank             |
| Angie    | Graf      | Strasburg Rec. Dept.         |
| Rachel   | Gruber    | DEN                          |
| Julio    | Iturreria | Retired                      |
| Monica   | Johnson   | Strasburg Schools            |
| Kathy    | Mahan     | Reap                         |
| Ruth     | McCormick |                              |
| Gretchen | Ricehill  | Arapahoe County              |
| Robin    | Schincke  | Morgan Community College     |
| Nathan   | Sumner    | Sum Financial Services Group |
| Libby    | Tart      | Adams County                 |

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| Steven | Vetter | I-70 Scout |
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**Approval of January 13, 2022 Meeting Minutes:**

Minutes were approved as submitted.

**Chairman Report:**

**Executive Director Report:**

Kip welcomed everyone to the meeting. Today the meeting focusing on the I-70 Corridor heading east. Workforce is fundamental to economic development. Reap is engaged in initiatives and efforts to make connections between school kids along the Corridor and jobs in the Metro Area. Item number 1, in the I-70 Scout you will see an ad that Reap has placed having to do with transit. CDOT has committed \$1.08 million dollars for a new transit bus service that would run from Limon to Denver. Reap has taken on this initiative that was started by the Transportation Solutions of Arapahoe County that is a non-profit. Andrea Suhaka heads that and has been the main advocate for this new transit service. We took this step further by engaging in the survey. This survey is running this week and next in the I-70 Scout. You can also go to the I-70 Reap website and take the survey. At the March meeting we will have the CDOT Director of this service, Jeff Prillwitz. Jeff will be speaking about what this will look like. Reap has co-sponsors for the survey, the I-70 Corridor Chamber of Commerce who has offered a phone number so people can call in with opinions about the service and Andrea is leading people to this survey. Item number 2 is I recently had a conversation with the Mayor of Deer Trail, Judd Behrens who is the interim Mayor. There is a new mayor, town clerk and town manager of Deer Trail. These are people I wish to engage with for purposes of transportation, modernization and economic development at Deer Trail. For future meetings Mark Harding has tentatively agreed to be the speaker in April to talk about water on the eastern plains. In May we will be discussing energy I have a tentative commitment from Xcel and Core to talk about energy generation, transmission and new technologies. What workforce development can be made with Xcel and Core? They are always looking for the next generation of workers. Schools are an economic development generators. Reap will be taking an active effort over the months and years to do connections with schools and job centers in the Metro Area.

**Guest Speaker – Tom Turrell, Superintendent of Byer School District 32J**

Byers has a K-12 campus, all in one campus. We are about 550 kids, preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. We have a three- and four-year-old preschool inside the building. We have a growing ELL migrant population and we are about 20% Spanish speaking maybe as a second language. We are a bedroom community to the Front Range. The small farms are being sold on acreages and homes are being built. Our growth is less than our counter parts in Strasburg, Bennett and Deer Trail are experiencing and it's all-around water. I read an article in the Post that says we love our teachers but the finding doesn't show that. The funding stream for those teachers is not there. As our housing prices continue to

skyrocket in Colorado the ability for teachers to buy homes is limited if not impossible. When you are talking about a person starting out making \$35 - \$45 thousand dollars in education that serves one of the most important roles in our society making that salary purchasing a \$300 - \$400 thousand dollar homes is nearly impossible. We do have teacher housing in Byers and that helps to alleviate the problem but that is not the case throughout the Corridor. It's a problem all the way out to Burlington on the I-70 Corridor. We have a challenge and Bennett and Strasburg more so getting teachers competing with Aurora and Brighton and the Metro Areas. Their starting salary is much more significant than ours. We have the home-town environment, but it is a \$15,000 pay cut. How do we get these teachers and families to relocate out here and how do they afford that in a manner that is possible? What will education look like in the future? Remote learning is going to stay here in some fashion. We sponsor an online school that serves students throughout Colorado. It doesn't matter what district they live in they can enroll in online schools and we are an authorizer of one of those schools. Since the pandemic we have seen online schools jump from 1,700 to 4,400 over the past 2 years and that is significant growth. We have seen demand for teachers on our online school and we found them. Because they are leaving in person settings and going online, we are finding really good teachers that are providing that education. They are leaving the brick and mortar to go to the online world. Getting back to housing, often times you have a pet project for a legislator that is trying to provide something for his or her region or district and what if we had some competitive grant where we could start looking at funding for land that is available and start building homes that would belong to the district that we could rent to teachers, it sure seems to be something that would be equitable across the state in providing staff to stay. I'm looking for hands on and entrepreneur opportunities for our students. We have an ag shop that is self-sufficient, they pay for state and national FFA trips from projects they make on the plasma cutter, we got a glow forge machine in the art department, we have quilting and sewing machines for consumer health and sciences, we have 3D printers and drones. We are looking at some virtual reality in our science lab in a few years or so.

### **Guest Speaker – Monica Johnson Superintendent of Strasburg School District 31J**

All of us have been working with kids for many decades and all over Colorado and the United States and kids are the same no matter where you go. They want an opportunity to have a dream, they deserve an opportunity to level that playing field for them so they can pursue the dream they want to have. Kids come to us with different resources and different experiences so it's our debt to level that field. It's a different population than what it was several years ago because Strasburg has had significant growth. We are seeing kids that have English as a second language and Strasburg has a high number of kids with special needs. We have fewer students than Bennett but we have more students in special ed. We are seeing kids coming into our community with pretty significant needs and in turn making sure those infrastructures are there to support them can be a challenge sometimes. Our kids are looking at the labor market and how it's changing so quickly and what they can do. We have kids that are looking at those hands-on vocational things that Tom was talking about and it's wonderful that they offer that within their school. Our kids have to go to Pickens to get those classes. Those kinds of classes are still critical to kids. What we are seeing is kids want exposure to state of the art things that are happening

with coding, technology and engineering, kids want those kinds of experiences. What we learned from remote learning was that kids don't have to sit in a classroom to learn something. So if we have a student that wants to access a class anywhere in the United States or around the world they have potential to access that. Kids go away to get an education, or a military experience and they are drawn back home to the place they are familiar with and people they are familiar with. What we need to do is to offer them a way to make a living in their home so they don't take that intellectual capacity that they have and sell it someplace else. We want to keep it here in our districts. We are falling off a cliff and we need to deploy the parachutes to get teacher back into our classrooms or we are going to come to a point where you are not going to have quality teachers standing in front of your kids. That is not only a terrible travesty for your kids, and that is an economic ruin if we cannot educate kids in our schools. You cannot ask someone who has a bachelor's degree or better to come back and sell that to you for \$40,000 when a house is going to cost them \$400,000. If leaders in the community don't come out and ask for some kind of reform in that area our children are going to suffer. This year we have a long-term sub in kindergarten because we couldn't find a teacher. If we want our kids to come back and bring that intellectual inventory that they have back to us than we need to set something up to make that appealing to come back to us. All four of us are fortunate to have our offices in a school so all we have to do is walk out, have a conversation with a kid and we know hope is alive and well.

**Kip Cheroutes:** I was reading my issue of the I-70 Scout and I was astonished at the want ads for teachers in all the school districts, is this abnormal or is this normal?

**Monica Johnson:** That is a conversation that we have been in for years. We are truly past a critical point for teacher shortages. I don't know what you call something that is past critical, this has been our cry for 15 years and now we are crying over it. If this is news to you, we have been doing a horrible job communicating this out to people who can make a difference.

**Kip Cheroutes:** It's new to me because I am new to Reap and new to the Corridor. It is dire the scale of schools and the number of teachers out there. You are losing a significant percentage of your workforce out there. We will find ways for Reap to offer solutions or at least lead the way.

#### **Guest Speaker – BJ Buchmann, Superintendent Deer Trail Schools 26J**

BJ shares his screen. I put together about some details of our school because we are in an area where there are some needs. I wanted to give you a view of our local community. I'm finishing my 4<sup>th</sup> year here at Deer Trail and this comes from the Arapahoe County Comprehensive Plan. We are a commuter community, age group from 50 – 59, the median age is 44, 77% of the people are born in Deer Trail and there is a transition taking place in the community but 21% falls below the poverty line. The new school was opened in 2017, 70 plus thousand square feet, which is similar to the other Deer Trail School. The population in the district is 828, the current student population is 308. We have had significant increases in our population here, there has been a number of new housing developments that have taken place. In the town as you know there have been some changes taking place. We have 22 teachers and I think

that is rather low it should be around 26 with numerous paras. At the primary grades we have a foundation program called “For Knowledge” which has been out a number of years, it’s significantly a knowledge-based curriculum. This year we had 76 students come back to Deer Trail. We are seeing online new students coming in. We have new families joining us and they are commuting because there is still not a lot of business in the Deer Trail area. It is not only new students that are coming to Deer Trail a lot of times we are having community members that are selling out of the Metro Area and coming out here for a little more peace and quiet. The average home here is 1.2 child per home. We do have everything under one roof, pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and that’s included in that 308 population. The class size is growing, our elementary is filling up. We have a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class of 32 students and I had to split a kindergarten class this year. People are asking, you have a new school and how long before you build another one? You look at the changes in the transitions 48 – 49% of our students are ELL, English is the second language. I had to go to Columbia to find a second language teacher. Christine Isha is our second language teacher and his wife is our parent engagement coordinator and we are really reaching out to these families and students as well to make sure these students have the greatest opportunity to learn English and grow in their vocabulary. One of the biggest dangers we face in the school community is apathy, if you don’t have a respondent rate over 20% that maybe some misleading numbers. We do have our goals and we talk about what we are looking for are life-long learners. The home environment is the greatest influence and support system. That nuclear family is very important and is continually under attack and the nuclear family is the key component of student success. The next thing is the quality of teacher. How do you define those quality teachers? I had an opening for a kindergarten teacher and did not have any applicants. What we want our graduates to look like? We are trying to make sure we are engaging our students and engage our community. We look at what we want our high school graduates to know when they leave. The more important question to ask is how you want them to live. Are we just preparing kids for the workforce or are we preparing our students to be active citizens, engaged participants? I always ask student what is it that you don’t want to be? You don’t want to be living in your parent’s basement, or underneath a bridge we want to produce kids to do a myriad of activities. We have certain kids that are on a 4-year program, not every student has to go to college. We talk about graduation pathways, what about a career, what about in state – out of state, internships, I think those are all excellent opportunities. We want to give them skills enough to have choices later on. The other thing we look at is military enlistment. We want students to come back home to take interest in the community and get involved in the community. It’s not only important to create workforce individuals but active engaged citizens.

### **Guest Speaker – Robin Purdy, Superintendent of Bennett School District 29J**

The Bennett School District is the fastest growing districts on the Corridor. We ended up with 125 new students this year and we have received more students over the last couple of months. We are standing at 1,254 students about 410 students are in our high school. We also starting to see changes in our diversity, in our ELL population somewhere between 30 – 40% of our student body. We are seeing more kids interested in construction trades, certificate programs. Bennett has always had a reputation for offering college courses. We have a relationship with the University of Colorado, with that we were able

to house our own instructors within our own building and offer courses to our students. In the spring of last year we ended up with about 73 students that had about 458 credits. This year those numbers are starting to fall. We are starting to see our students getting interested in some of our CTE Programming and Pickens Programming. We have students that are interested in the automotive service, technology, culinary arts and cosmetology. We also have students, and we are trying to set up an intern program. We have a CTE Coordinator within our district that was in a part time position and served as our principal a couple of years ago. We have now hired a CTE Coordinator that is teaching construction trades because we have students that are wanting to participate in that. We have a very strong FFA Program strong in horticulture and we have a lot of students are participating in that. We still have kids that's needs are not being met so we have added computer coding, business course work. We have students that want to do internships in business and accounting, veterinarian, automotive and welding. With the growth we are starting to see some changes in what our student's needs are and how we meet those needs. We are still small, yet we still have key roles where we need to put folks in within our district. We employ about 70 teachers and we know now that we have about 13 housing developments that are in progress and another 2 that are being discussed. We know, working with our planner we could have between 10,000 to 20,000 more student in the next 20 years. We have been working with our board and staff to make sure we can fill those positions. We have had subs in math and science and those are two key areas that we are struggling to hire. Some of our high school classes have 30 – 45 students in them. In the Bennett School District we have teachers that are walking because they can make \$10,000 – \$15,000 more a year than we can offer here in Bennett. We have done a great deal to raise our salary scale but it is still not where it needs to be. The majority of our teachers commute from the Metro Area. We have situations where we have a teacher, a nurse, a fire fighter and a police officer all renting a house, living in rooms so they can make it work for themselves. Bennett has not had teacher housing in many years so we are talking about how we can use some of the land dedication from developers to build teacher housing. We as superintendents don't want to be a landlord, but we know we have to if we want to recruit. We have administrators that are really hard to find as well, principals in each building and they can't afford to live in the Bennett School District so they are commuting from other areas. Those are some of the challenges that we are dealing with within the Bennett School District.

**Kip Cheroutes:** In my mind some of the challenges on the I-70 Corridor going east, it's evolving away from ag and I don't what to call it so where does education follow suit and take the lead. When 40% of your student body speaks Spanish as a primary language, how do they learn, how do you teach? I'm also hearing the need for science technology, STEM. How do you get STEM more into the curriculum and how do you show kids there are STEM jobs? The most critical thing that I've heard is teachers, where do you find them, how do you keep them, where do you house them? You have enlightened me on how do you keep the school districts intact, teachers and what can housing developments do to help? To the 4 speakers, you do monster mental and extraordinary work in the most trying of times. Rachel Gruber is here to explain the mission of DEN Airport for workforce development.

**Rachel Gruber:** I am acting Senior Director of Government Affairs, but I will be going back to handling regional affairs. In regard to workforce as in every industry we have seen a decrease in the aviation folks that are coming in. We want to provide opportunities that allows students to grow. One big component is the Center for Excellence and Equity in Aviation. It's part of our great hall completion phase which was approved by Denver City Council in January, so it's a \$1.3 billion dollar project and encompassing that is the Center. The Center will be on level 4 of the Weston and it's expected to be completed by 2027 or 2028. We want this to be a hub for aviation education bringing in students and communities and in the I-70 Corridor. It will be a great opportunity and the first in Colorado, this will be very centralized and specific to aviation. We will also outline specific aviation pathways and this encompasses K-12. There is a program called Gateway to DEN, it is an introduction to aviation by network building, local schools and that would be us working with you as a team to identify your needs and how are we able to partner together. We previously adopted a school in Montbello to interrogate aviation curriculum into their learning. They can have speakers come in so students can learn about aviation within their own school curriculum. We also have summer internship programs. Those are really great opportunities for students coming out of high school to come out to the airport and learn more. We have 15 interns that are spread throughout the airport. At the airport we have over 200 classifications of jobs just for the City and County of Denver. We have over 30,000 employees and support over 150 indirect jobs. Another component we have is called DEN Academy and it's for 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It's a 4-week program, every Thursday and everyday they go through a different area. We are going to host Byer's high school students at DEN in April. We will be providing transportation to bring the students out to show them the different career opportunities and meeting with some of the leadership.

**Kip Cheroutes:** We are happy to engage with the other school districts to do something similar for your schools to get them into Rachel's backyard. This is a wonderful opportunity and this represents a huge job center. I'm talking to the folks at Core and we will see if we can arrange a field trip to go see Core. I'm also looking into others in the Metro Area that can provide a similar experience for students. It's what I think Reap should be doing as a workforce development.

#### **Development Updates:**

#### **Other Business:**

#### **Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:06 p.m.