
Press and Publicity Report

OCTOBER 2020



Community bonds boost digital access in Colorado



A network of partners in Pueblo, CO provides computers and wifi where online access is hard to come by.

By Cecily Sailer

October 7, 2020

The former steel town of Pueblo, Colorado, sits about halfway between Denver and the New Mexico border on Interstate 25. Home to 170,000 people, this growing city is the largest, by far, in an otherwise rural county that spans 2,400 square miles of hills and desert.

As Pueblo continues to grow, it has, so far, retained some of its small-town feel, says Melanie Bravo, director of place-based giving at the [Caring for Colorado Foundation](#). “There’s a connectedness. People want to know where you went to high school and who your grandma is because everyone is connected in some way.”

But when it comes to connectivity of another kind, Pueblo is lagging behind. As the sixth-largest city in the state, Pueblo ranks 74th in terms of internet access.

“We don’t make money for the telecom systems,” says Nick Potter, director of community relations for the [Pueblo City-County Library](#) (PCCL). “So our infrastructure here is not what it is when you get further north, like Denver and Colorado Springs.”

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The Rawlings Public Library in downtown Pueblo is one of the few places in town where people can access computers and internet for free for extended periods of time. [Photo by Kelly West]

When the pandemic forced school buildings to close and learning shifted online, Pueblo’s connectivity deficits left many kids, teens, and families cut off from crucial academic and community support.

“I was hearing the stories, you know, about kids who are great students, but their teachers were saying they hadn’t checked in at all,” says Bravo.

Acutely aware of Pueblo’s digital divide, Caring for Colorado Foundation purchased 300 Google Chromebooks and T-Mobile wifi hotspots for families across the area, paid for through its [Packard Fund for Pueblo](#). Families can keep the devices for three-month periods and renew for as long as two years.

But identifying who needed the technology and how to reach them — in such a sprawling county — became the next challenge.

Caring for Colorado partnered with the Pueblo City-County ~~Share~~ Library, which in turn partnered with organizations ~~this~~ throughout the area — Pueblo's rural school district, Boys & Girls Clubs of Pueblo County, the homeless support group P^SADA, and others — to ensure the equipment reached as many people as possible as quickly as possible.

“The reason why organizations like Boys & Girls Club are so critical when a crisis hits is because their relationships are already there,” Bravo says.

Each group began its own outreach to determine what their clients and families needed, including online access and devices, and even this came with its own learning curve.

President and CEO of Pueblo's Boys & Girls Clubs Angela Giron recalls a conversation with a high school student this spring. “He’s taking honors classes, and he’s doing them from his phone,” she says. “My head blew off. How could that be? We think we’re doing the right thing by calling and asking, ‘Do you have a device?’ They say yes [because they have a smartphone], so we learned to get more specific.”

As the Chromebooks and wifi hotspots found new homes throughout Pueblo County, the initiative yielded new insight about the barriers to connectivity in an area lacking in infrastructure. In some parts of the county, for example, the T-Mobile wifi hotspots didn’t work because T-Mobile didn’t service that neighborhood.



Daisy Arreola works on her math homework at the Boys & Girls Club of Pueblo County, one of the organizations that partnered with the Pueblo City-County Library to identify families in need of Chromebooks and wifi hotspots. [Photo by Kelly West]

For Danny Valdez and his granddaughter Brittney, however, the technology was “such a blessed thing.” When schools went remote in March, the Valdezes had no internet access at home. The technology offered through Boys & Girls Club allowed Brittney to join her third-grade classmates online — most of the time.

“Remote learning was good,” Valdez said, “but we saw a lot of pros and cons. Sometimes the internet was down, or the internet wasn’t connected for some reasons. Teachers were having those issues as well. It wasn’t just students.”

As a grandparent caregiver, Valdez, age 65, was also unfamiliar with how the technology worked — he jokes about holding out for years when it came to buying a cell phone. He now credits the Boys & Girls Club programs, which reopened with mask and social-distancing measures this summer, with helping Brittney learn to use the technology and find connection with her peers.

"When school did finally start, she was so overwhelmed," says Valdez. "Because some of the kids at Boys & Girls Club were more active navigating the Chromebook than me or my wife, they could help her quicker. That helped us help her."

Share this In a community like Pueblo, nonprofits, philanthropists, and community spaces like the library form a crucial web of support to address a digital divide that became suddenly more acute during the pandemic — a phenomenon happening across the U.S.

While internet access may seem ubiquitous, there are many pockets across the country where access is patchwork, limited, unreliable, or nonexistent. Even where infrastructure exists, internet access isn't free or feasible for people who struggle financially.

While the United Nations declared internet access a human right in 2016, a survey the following year showed 68 percent of Americans view internet access as a privilege, not a right. Strangely, among those who considered internet access a privilege, 64 percent said it was, for them, also a necessity.

In Pueblo, the necessity of online access is suddenly more obvious, and ensuring access for everyone will take time, commitment, and resources. Even as connectivity grows, another need emerges — to educate new users about how devices work and how best to use them.

"You think these native users know everything about computers, but basically they know everything about navigating YouTube or Instagram," says Potter of PCCL. "They don't always know how to build a resume online, or anything like that, so we provide that digital literacy for them."



Aaron Ramierz, left, manager of special collections and museum services, and Blake Hatton, digitization coordinator, lead an online class on how to fry a Twinkie at the Rawlings Library in Pueblo. In response to the pandemic, the library started offering live-stream and recorded programs around literacy, cooking, gardening, career development, and more. [Photo by Kelly West]

Notably, libraries are one of few places where people can access computers and internet for free for extended periods of time. The Pueblo City-County Library, like many others across the country, was closed for several months to visitors, and only recently reopened at much lower capacity and with far less activity.

To adapt and continue its service to the community, PCCL created **Library on Demand**, which offers live-stream and recorded programs around literacy, cooking, gardening, career development, and more.

Now, as the fall sets in, some students in Pueblo are returning to their classrooms after weeks of online learning to start the semester. As each of Pueblo's three school districts implements its own reopening plan, the city's local paper has reported **new Covid-19 spikes the past week**, so it's possible remote learning will be necessary again.

Fortunately, the network among local nonprofits, philanthropists, and other agencies like the library have grown stronger in recent months, and Potter says they're invested for the long haul. "We're trying to make sure people have the devices and everything they need," he says, "the ~~st~~ connectivity they need, for as long as we're in this crisis." this



Children play a trivia game on laptops at the Boys & Girls Club of Pueblo County, which hosts after-school programs during the week. [Photo by Kelly West]

Top photo: Brittney Valdez, 8, gets help on her homework from Guadalupe Vasquez at the Boys & Girls Club of Pueblo County on the Chromebook she received from the Pueblo Library. [Photo by Kelly West]

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PUBLIC NOTICES



WANT TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?

The City of Pueblo is seeking volunteers who would be interested in serving on the PUEBLO CITY-COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES. There is one Joint City-County appointment available to serve a five-year term expiring December 31, 2025.

The Board of Trustees holds and administers library properties and funds; formulates policies and guides the direction of the library affairs; relates the library to the community's needs and determines and adopts written policies to govern the operation, use and program of the library. The Board of Trustees endorses expenditures, formulates and approves the annual budget, presents the library's program to the community, hires the director and delegates the operation and management of the library to him/her; attends monthly board meetings and any regular or ad hoc committee meetings.

Applications may be obtained in the Office of the City Clerk or on the City Clerk's webpage at www.pueblo.us. You may personally deliver or mail your application to the Office of the City Clerk at #1 City Hall Place, Pueblo, CO 81003, or you may e-mail your application to Tammy Martinez in the Office of the City Clerk at tmartinez@pueblo.us.

Applications must be received by the Office of the City Clerk on or before 8:00 am on Monday, October 26, 2020.

Brenda Armijo
Brenda Armijo, CMC
City Clerk

PU-0000210188-01

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE AS TO PROPOSED BUDGET AND PUBLIC HEARING

Notice is hereby given that a proposed budget has been submitted to the Pueblo City-County Library District Board of Trustees for the ensuing year of 2021, and a copy of such proposed budget has been filed in the office of the District at 100 E. Abriendo Avenue, Pueblo, Colorado, where same is open for public inspection. The proposed budget is available on the website of Pueblo City-County Library: www.pueblolibrary.org.

A public hearing on such proposed budget will be held Thursday, November 19, 2020, at 5:30 p.m., during the regular meeting of the Pueblo City-County Library District Board of Trustees at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Library, 100 E. Abriendo Ave., Pueblo, Colorado 81004.

Any interested elector within such Pueblo City-County Library District will be given the opportunity at the hearing to be heard concerning the proposed budget and may inspect the proposed budget and file or register any objections thereto at any time prior to the final adoption of the budget, scheduled for Thursday, December 10, 2020 5:30 p.m., at the Robert Hoag Rawlings Library, 100 E. Abriendo Ave., Pueblo, Colorado 81004.

Alexandria A. Romero, CPA
Controller
Pueblo City-County Library District

PU-0000207220-01



50°

News

By [Dan Beedie](#)

today at 11:04 am

Published [October 15, 2020](#) 10:50 am



Opposing sides weighing deal on Pueblo's Columbus statue

PUEBLO, Colo. (KRDO) -- A plan for the Christopher Columbus statue in Pueblo is still in the works.

The Pueblo Chapter of the Sons of Italy and Pueblo's indigenous community are going through mediation on a plan that would include a new multicultural plaza at the site of the Columbus statue. However, the plan still requires approval from the Pueblo City-County Library District and Pueblo City Council.

Pueblo City Council President Dennis Flores told KRDO Thursday both sides agreed on a plan that would keep the bust of Christopher Columbus on Abriendo Avenue, across from the Rawling Library. However, Rita Martinez with Pueblo's indigenous communities says no formal agreement has been made.

Flores says the plaza's full name would be 'The Pueblo Historical Reconciliation Plaza'. Flores says this is a permanent solution that will also bring the community together and bring an end to the decades-long division.

There is also no formal plan outline on the table just yet. However, Flores believes this plaza or outdoor museum would include the Columbus bust, and statues of historical figures from both the black and indigenous communities.

The Pueblo City-County Library District Board discussed the project at a work session on Tuesday, and are set to formally vote on the proposed plan during their next board meeting on Oct. 22.

Pueblo City Council President Dennis Flores told KRDO Thursday both sides agreed on a plan that would keep the bust of Christopher Columbus on Abriendo Avenue, across from the Rawling Library. However, Rita Martinez with Pueblo's indigenous communities says no formal agreement has been made.

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Local News / Pueblo



Dan Beedie

Dan is a bureau reporter based out of Pueblo. [Learn more about Dan here.](#)

Note: This is an update to the KRDO story



29°

News

By [Dan Beedie](#)

October 15, 2020 11:04 am

Published [October 15, 2020 10:50 am](#)



Opposing sides weighing deal on Pueblo's Columbus statue

PUEBLO, Colo. (KRDO) -- A plan for the Christopher Columbus statue in Pueblo is still in the works.

According to a mediation progress report obtained by KRDO, The Pueblo Chapter of the Sons of Italy and Pueblo's indigenous community agreed on a plan that would include a new multicultural plaza at the site of the Columbus statue. However, the plan still requires approval from the Pueblo City-County Library District and Pueblo City Council.

Pueblo City Council President Dennis Flores and the city-hired mediator Fred Galves told KRDO Thursday both sides agreed on a plan that would keep the bust of Christopher Columbus on Abriendo Avenue, across from the Rawling Library. However, Rita Martinez with Pueblo's indigenous communities says no formal agreement has been made.

Martinez says she has only agreed to continue talks. Beyond that, Martinez says she hasn't agreed to any plans for a multi-cultural plaza just yet.

Galves tells KRDO that's not true, and both sides agreed to many things including a framework to a plan which included the multi-cultural plaza and keeping the monument on Abriendo Avenue.

The mediator says when the mediations concluded the only disagreement left on the table was what to do with the monument of Columbus as the public waited for the plaza. Some wanted the monument covered up, while others did not.

Despite the disagreement on Thursday, the city of Pueblo is moving forward with their plans to potentially build a plaza. Flores says the city is currently drafting an ordinance to form a commission that would oversee finance and construction of the project.

Flores says the plaza's full name would be 'The Pueblo Historical Reconciliation Plaza'. Flores says this is a permanent solution that will also bring the community together and bring an end to the decades-long division.

There is also no formal plan outline on the table just yet. However, Flores believes this plaza or outdoor museum would include the Columbus bust, and statues of historical figures from both the black and indigenous communities.

The Pueblo City-County Library District Board discussed the project at a work session on Tuesday, and are set to formally vote on the proposed plan during their next board meeting on Oct. 22.

The debate over whether the statue should remain or go has become more charged in recent months. Protesters calling for the statue's removal held demonstrations at the statue every Sunday for more than a dozen weeks.

Sometimes, the peaceful protesters were met with counter-protesters, leading to confrontations between the protesters and with police. Law enforcement has been called out to barricade the 100 block of East Abriendo Avenue every Sunday for more than 3 months.

Over the weekend, the bust of Christopher Columbus was vandalized with red paint and tomatoes. Pueblo Police have released surveillance video of the potential person of interest, asking the public's help to identify the individual.

Editor's Note: City Council President Dennis Flores initially told KRDO that both sides had made an agreement. Rita Martinez reached out to us an hour later to say that no formal agreement had been made.

Local News / Pueblo



Dan Beedie

Dan is a bureau reporter based out of Pueblo. [Learn more about Dan here.](#)

Local Boys and Girls Clubs take part in after-school event

Jon Pompia The Pueblo Chieftain

Published 1:18 p.m. MT Oct. 19, 2020

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Pueblo County is taking part in Lights on Afterschool, a nationwide event organized by the Afterschool Alliance that calls attention to the importance of after-school programs and the resources required to keep the lights on and the doors open.

In this partnership, Boys and Girls Clubs is teaming up with Colorado State Extension 4H, El Pueblo History Museum, Indoor Farming Innovation Zone/The I Will Projects, GOAL Academy, Pueblo City-County Library District, Pueblo County Youth Advisory Council, Pueblo Girl Scouts, Pueblo Nature Wildlife Discovery Center, Pueblo YMCA, Pueblo Zoo, Sangre de Cristo Arts and Conference Center, and Upward Bound CSU-Pueblo.

From today through Friday, a virtual scavenger hunt is slated. Families are challenged to answer questions about each Clubhouse and the community partner of the day on Google Forms. Correct answers are rewarded with entry in a drawing for a prize at the conclusion of the hunt.

Kids from East Side, Sprague, Irving, Avondale Clubhouses and SRDA teen site are participating in fun and engaging activities like "design a light bulb."

A reading of a proclamation by city and county officials, at the official lighting of Pueblo Memorial Hall at 6 p.m. Thursday, is designed to show support for after-school programs. The public is welcome to attend.

A virtual family pumpkin carving contest, sponsored by Black Hills Energy, will feature information provided by Devin Moeller, Black Hills Energy's renewable energy manager, about solar energy and creating a solar-powered pumpkin.

The virtual event will take place at 6 p.m. Friday and 2 and 6 p.m. Saturday. In this 45-minute contest, family members may create their own design and pick one to be judged by Black Hills Energy representatives. Winners will receive prizes.

Register for the contest, and learn more about the week's activities, at bgcpkids.org.

Chieftain reporter Jon Pompia can be reached by email at jpompia@chieftain.com or at twitter.com/jpompia.



38°

Top Stories

By [Lauren Barnas](#)

Published [October 22, 2020](#) 5:23 pm



Board expected to vote on multicultural plaza in Pueblo

PUEBLO, Colo. (KRDO) — The Pueblo City-County Library District Board of Trustees is meeting Thursday night to discuss a plan to build a multicultural plaza near the Rawlings Library.

The plaza proposal follows [failed negotiations](#) about what do to with the Christopher Columbus statue. Under the proposal, the Christopher Columbus statue would stay. Two other statues honoring the Indigenous community and African Americans would be built near it. The space would officially be called the "Pueblo Historical Reconciliation Plaza."

According to information released ahead of the meeting, the City of Pueblo would provide \$25,000 and hire professionals to build the plaza.

The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. Public comment is expected.

Watch KRDO News Channel 13 at 10 p.m. to hear what the board decides.

[Local News](#) / [News](#) / [Pueblo](#)



26°

Top Stories

By Lauren Barnes

October 22, 2020 10:21 pm

Published October 22, 2020 5:23 pm



Pueblo library board votes down multicultural plaza proposal

PUEBLO, Colo. (KRDO) — The Pueblo City-County Library District Board of Trustees voted 7-1 Thursday night, declining to take on the city's proposal to build a multicultural plaza on Abriendo Avenue in front of the public library.

The plaza proposal follows a local [mediation](#) about what do to with the Christopher Columbus statue. The Italian founder of the "New World" is often hailed a hero, though Native Americans say his conquests were violent and villainous. The debate continues 500 years after his voyage.

The plaza proposal would have built two additional statues next to Columbus, including a statue honoring African Americans and another representing the Indigenous community.

Gino Carleo, the leader of the local Sons of Italy chapter, was on-board with the plaza plan.

"We have agreed and so has the Sons of Italy lodge, that we would go for this," Carleo said. "We think it would be fine and it would be very educational for everyone."

The plan would have also created a multicultural commission. Deborah Espinosa, a representative for the Indigenous community, was not a fan of new statues, but would still like to see a commission. It's unclear if that could happen.

"More statues, we don't see that as a being answer," Espinosa said. "We're very clear on our position. As we go forward, we'll pursue multiple civic paths to reach our goal."

In a statement Thursday night, the board said it supports a peaceful resolution, but it is not the board's responsibility to take on the embattled statue.

Pueblo City Council President Dennis Flores told KRDO he is disappointed in the board's decision and that city council will have to consider where to go from here.

Pueblo Library Board rejects proposal to take responsibility of Columbus Statue



By: [Benjamin Lloyd](#)

Posted at 8:42 PM, Oct 22, 2020
and last updated 2020-10-23 00:17:38-04

PUEBLO — The Pueblo City County Library District Board of Trustees voted down a proposal Thursday night on whether to take responsibility for the Christopher Columbus statue and to develop a plaza on library property.

The proposal was presented by city council to develop the plaza to include other statues of historical significance in order to bring a more diverse display of social justice, equality, and race relations.

Following the decision to reject the proposal, PCCLD Executive Director Jon Walker released the following statement:

"The Library District was presented with a proposal from the City of Pueblo and the Pueblo City Council President regarding the Christopher Columbus statue located on Abriendo Ave. across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library. The proposal asked the Library District to take responsibility for the current median location of the Columbus statue as well as develop plans to create a plaza with additional statues on library property adjacent to the Columbus statue."

It is the position of the Pueblo City-County Library District Board of Trustees that this particular proposal is not acceptable. However, it must be clearly stated that the library district supports social justice, racial equality, and community harmony. While the library district does not view the City's proposal as a proper role for the library, the library district supports a peaceful resolution to the controversy and stands ready to help both within its means and within the mission of the institution.

The Library will continue to serve as a foundation to the Pueblo community, offering welcoming and open facilities, encouraging the joy of reading, supporting lifelong learning and presenting access to information from around the world. The Library serves as a place for the free and open exchange of ideas. It is our hope that the City and citizens of Pueblo develop an equitable and well-considered resolution to this complex issue."

PCCLD Executive Director Jon Walker

Columbus Day is no longer considered a holiday in the state of Colorado, but that did not stop this year's celebration from taking place on Abriendo Ave. Governor Jared Polis signed a bill to change the day to Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini Day starting this year. Absent at this year's event were protesters who have rallied near the statue since the summer.

Columbus Day supporters like Stimmle said the day is not about Christopher Columbus or his statue at the Christopher Columbus Piazza, instead, it's about celebrating Italian heritage. "We're about pride of where our ancestors came from and we're about helping people," said Stimmle.

The decision by the library board leaves the future of the display in question as attempts at mediation by Mayor Nick Gradisar did not reach a solution this summer.

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TOP STORIES

Pueblo Library Board of Trustees vote down Columbus statue proposal



Christopher Columbus statue in Pueblo

Posted: Oct 22, 2020 / 08:22 PM MDT / Updated: Oct 22, 2020 / 08:22 PM MDT

PUEBLO, Colo. – Pueblo City-County Library District's Board of Trustees voted down a proposal from City of Pueblo and the Pueblo City Council president to take responsibility for the current median location of the Christopher Columbus statue and to develop a statue plaza to be located on library property at Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library, 100 E. Abriendo Ave. The Christopher Columbus statue is located on Abriendo Avenue directly across from Rawlings Library.

RELATED CONTENT

[An honor or an embarrassment: Pueblo split on Columbus Statue](#)

[Christopher Columbus statue vandalized in Pueblo](#)

[Measure concerning Christopher Columbus statue won't make Pueblo's November ballot](#)

[Mayor Gradisar issues statement on Columbus statue mediation in Pueblo](#)

Voting on the proposal occurred during the trustees' Thursday night public board meeting at Rawlings Library.

Regarding the matter, PCCLD Executive Director Jon Walker issued the following statement:

"The Library District was presented with a proposal from the City of Pueblo and the Pueblo City Council President regarding the Christopher Columbus statue located on Abriendo Ave. across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library. The proposal asked the Library District to take responsibility for the current median location of the Columbus statue as well as develop plans to create a plaza with additional statues on library property adjacent to the Columbus statue.

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However, it must be clearly stated that the library district supports social justice, racial equality, and community harmony. While the library district does not view the City's proposal as a proper role for the library, the library district supports a peaceful resolution to the controversy and stands ready to help both within its means and within the mission of the institution.

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Pueblo Library Board votes against multicultural plaza proposal



Christopher Columbus statue near the Rawlings library in Pueblo. (KKTV)

By [Nicole Heins](#)

Published: Oct. 23, 2020 at 1:40 PM MDT | Updated: 1 hours ago

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PUEBLO, Colo. (KKTV) - The future of the Christopher Columbus statue next to the Rawlings Library in Pueblo is still up in the air.

Thursday night the Pueblo City-County Library District's Board of Trustees voted 6 to 1 against a proposal that would develop a statue plaza to be located on library property.

This middle ground would have been home to the Columbus statue and a few others. A statement released by the PCCLD Executive Director Jon Walker says:

"The Library District was presented with a proposal from the City of Pueblo and the Pueblo City Council President regarding the Christopher Columbus statue located on Abriendo Ave, across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library. The proposal asked the Library District to take responsibility for the current median location of the Columbus statue as well as develop plans to create a plaza with additional statues on library property adjacent to the Columbus statue.

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City council president Dennis Flores tells 11 news he is "just disappointed. I will be looking for other options and next steps. I will continue to talk to both sides with the help of the mediator." According to the City of Pueblo, the [mediator](#) has not been used since this proposal for the area near the library began.

11 news reached out to the Sons of Italy but they have no comment on the matter.

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LOCAL

Library trustees decline to support Columbus statue proposal

Jon Pompia The Pueblo Chieftain

Published 3:05 p.m. MT Oct. 23, 2020



Protestors gather around the Christopher Columbus Piazza on Abriendo Avenue to call for its removal during one of a series of demonstrations. *Jon Pompia*

A compromise proposal that would have seen the Pueblo City-County Library District assume responsibility for the Christopher Columbus Piazza and develop a complementary statue plaza on library property has come to naught.

On Thursday, the Pueblo City-County Library District's board of trustees voted down the proposal, which was championed by Dennis Flores, president of Pueblo city council, following city-facilitated mediation to arrive at a compromise regarding the future of the monument.

The vote came during the trustees' public board meeting at The Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library, site of the proposed statue plaza.

"The library district was presented with a proposal from the city of Pueblo and the Pueblo city council president regarding the Christopher Columbus statue located across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library," Jon Walker, executive director of the library district, said in a release. "The proposal asked the library

that both groups continue to do the hard work of finding a Pueblo solution."

As it's apparently back to the proverbial drawing board, Flores said he has no "Plan B" at the present time.

"The library's decision does frustrate me," Flores said, adding that the board of trustees may have viewed the situation as the city handing over a "hot potato."

"I don't know where we go from here," he said. "I will have to go back to city council and let them know my first stab didn't work."

The library district, Walker added, will fulfill its designated role "as a foundation to the Pueblo community, offering welcoming and open facilities, encouraging the joy of reading, supporting lifelong learning and presenting access to information from around the world.

"The library serves as a place for the free and open exchange of ideas. It is our hope that the city and citizens of Pueblo develop an equitable and well-considered resolution to this complex issue."

Chieftain reporter Jon Pompia can be reached by email at jpompia@chieftain.com or at twitter.com/jpompia.

NEWS

Pueblo libraries are open, but preparing for what changes may come as COVID-19 cases increase

Alexis Smith The Pueblo Chieftain

Published 11:13 a.m. MT Oct. 25, 2020



Kim Baltazar restocks videos at the Rawlings Public Library on Thursday. *CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/ZACHARY ALLEN*



Jonathan Cook, left, gets help with printing paperwork from library specialist Kathy Kearney at the Rawlings Public Library on Thursday. *CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/ZACHARY ALLEN*

The Pueblo City-County Library District has reopened in phases for the health and safety of the community, but there is still concern lingering as the number of coronavirus cases locally spikes.

Sherri Baca, associate executive director of the library district described its approach for reopening as a conservative and cautious.

“We closed with everybody else around mid-March, then we brought our staff back around the end of April – we didn’t open our buildings to public access until mid-June,” Baca said. “Prior to that, in early May, we began accepting materials once again in our book drops and we initiated curbside pick up for library check outs. So, early on we were back in the swing of things.”

During the time that the library was closed to the public though, the community was still utilizing the resources it provides digitally – audiobooks, e-books, streaming movies, and participating in virtual programs.

When the library opened in mid-June, the public was able to begin using the computers within the building, and by the end of June, people could browse and check out books.

Now, the library is what Baca said in phase 4.1 where it is back to normal operating hours and individuals are permitted to be in the library for one hour a day.

The use of the library’s digital resources has remained steady despite reopening the building to the public because people have been hesitant to return. But Baca said the librarians adapted, offering online virtual programs daily.

“People are just not as willing to come into the building as they were before. So, we are offering both in person service and if people are just not able or willing to come in at this point, they can do a lot online,” Baca added. “So, you can catch a program while it’s happening in real time, and there’s also an on-demand link so you can look at it later.”

With the increasing number of cases of COVID-19 in Pueblo, Baca said there is concern amongst library staff, but they are prepared.

“We’re preparing our teams now for the potential that we may have to step back,” Baca noted. “Of course, the public health orders will dictate that, so we’re pretty nimble at this point. We’ve already created the processes and the plans, so we would be able to step back down to the level the Pueblo Department of Health and Environment will require. It will be a process and we’re willing and ready to do that – we would hope not to have to, but it’s the virus that dictates what the needs are and we want to make sure that our visitors and our staff are safe.”

Baca said for now, the library’s greatest message is that at this point in time the libraries are open, but noted the importance of the one hour time limit per individual.

“According to the variance for Pueblo County, individuals are allowed in the building for one hour a day,” Baca said. “But books are available, we have public use computers available, and lots of electronic resources that will continue to be available. So, at this point we’re really happy to be open our normal hours, but we will be sharing of course if that changes with any of the health orders moving forward.”

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Winner: Unreasonable to saddle library with monument decision

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Those opposed to the presence of the Christopher Columbus Piazza on Abriendo Avenue have gathered on Sundays as a show of protest. *Chieftain File Photo*

Last week, the board of trustees of the Pueblo City-County Library District declined to support a proposal that would have placed the Christopher Columbus Piazza under its auspices as part of a multi-statue Reconciliation Plaza.

The proposal was championed by Pueblo City Council President Dennis Flores, who believed he had arrived at an equitable resolution to quell the controversy surrounding the Columbus monument's presence in the Mesa Junction, directly across from the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library.

Councilwoman Lori Winner, however, believes that not only was Flores' proposal "unreasonable," the library district was in effect "set up" by being forced to make decision on a hot-button issue.

"The district never should have been put in that position," Winner told the Pueblo Chieftain Tuesday. "They knew nothing about the proposal and it's completely wrong to imply that they let the community down by failing to approve it."

As proposed, the Reconciliation Plaza would have paired the Columbus monument with the Lincoln Home's Martin Luther King Jr./Emmitt Till statue, and a statue honoring an indigenous leader, in a canopy setting.

In a statement, the board of trustees said the library district "does not view the city's proposal as a proper role for the library."

"However, it must be clearly stated that the library district supports social justice, racial equality, and community harmony, and supports a peaceful resolution to the controversy and stands ready to help both within its means and within the mission of the institution," according to a statement issued following the decision.

Flores, who expressed disappointment with that decision, addressed the issue during Monday's City Council meeting.

He said that together with Fred Galves, the mediator hired by the city to broker a resolution, "We brought the football down to the one-yard line."

"I was not very happy that the library district made the decision that they wanted no part of this," Flores said.

"Because I really feel that they are part of the community and should have helped the city in moving this forward."

The failure of mediation to break the stalemate between pro- and anti-Columbus monument groups leaves the future of the 115-year-old piazza in doubt.

"So where do we go from here?" Flores offered Monday. "I'm giving it some thought. There might be some other opportunities to maybe solve this issue, so we'll have to talk about this going forward."

One option, the council president said, "is to try to conclude what I've tried to do," before adding, "Or maybe there is some other type of action this council wants to pursue."

Flores' remarks did not sit well with Winner.

"Dennis likes to think he's the only one who's correct, and that everyone else is wrong," she said. "It's just an intimidation process to throw the blame on someone else."

Winner believes that council as a whole didn't raise an objection to Flores' proposal "because everybody else just wanted to delay the issue and stall."

When Flores presented his plan for what became known as the Reconciliation Plaza, Winner said the implication was that the proposal was divinely inspired. And to suggest that the King/Till statue be relocated from the Lincoln Home to Abriendo Avenue was ill-advised.

As was Flores' suggestion that within the plaza, the depiction of Emmitt Till could come to represent George Floyd.

"When he said that, I about died," Winner said.

Even if the Reconciliation Plaza had come to fruition, with the Columbus monument sharing space with leaders from the Black and indigenous communities, Winner believes the controversy would have continued.

"This is a political movement, going on all over the nation," Winner said, adding that mediation was similarly doomed to fail. "When they announced that Fred Galves was hired as mediator, I felt it better to play 'rock, paper, scissors,' best three out of five, than to try to mediate.

"There will never be an agreement coming out of mediation."

The fact remains, however, that while a pro-monument faction led by the local Sons of Italy Lodge maintains that the piazza will never leave Abriendo Avenue, a vocal segment of the community believes it should be removed, or at least relocated to private property.

And until a resolution acceptable to both sides is reached, the anti-monument group has pledged to continue protesting at the piazza site.

"Those protests are costing citizens \$17,000 to \$20,000 every Sunday," said Winner. "And if we leave the statue up, the protests are just going to continue. There's never going to be a satisfactory solution on either side, and my fear is that someone is going to get hurt, or killed, over a stupid statue."

"I'm aware of the historical destination, and I understand that it's special to the Italians.. And personally, I don't think it should be removed. But it's not worth someone getting injured or killed, and I think we need to talk about having it removed. We just can't let this go on and on."

"But the mayor doesn't want to face it, and no one else does either."

Councilman Mark Aliff said that while he applauds Flores' effort, and supports any proposal that allows the Columbus monument to remain in the Mesa Junction, he does not feel the library district should be vilified for its decision.

"The library made a choice based on where they're at as an organization. They did not want to be saddled with that responsibility and it's their right to do that."

"The problems with the Columbus monument, or any of the issues surrounding it, have nothing to do with the library. We need to be careful when we lay blame to somebody when things don't move forward."

From the very beginning, Aliff said he wanted City Council to "make a stand" and express support for leaving the monument in place.

"It's a part of Italian heritage and a part of Pueblo history, and I don't support it coming down," he said. "I will be supportive of any solution that allows it to remain."

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