

STUDY SESSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Members of Boulder City Council; Members of City of

Boulder Planning Board; Members of Boulder County Board of Commissioners; Members of Boulder County Planning Commission

FROM: City of Boulder Comprehensive Planning Staff;

Boulder County Long-Range Planning Staff

DATE: February 5, 2025

SUBJECT: Working Session: Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update –

Existing Conditions and Focus Areas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this session is to convene all four adopting bodies of the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) to:

- (1) Review 'A Boulder Today' which summarizes Phase 1 of the major update to the Plan (Existing Conditions Analysis)
- (2) Review community input to date
- (3) Discuss and gather preliminary guidance on Focus Areas for the next phase of work with the community

This session will include a presentation by the project team and small group discussions among policy makers. Outcomes of this session will be included in an information packet (IP) to all four bodies, scheduled for distribution in late March.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Plan provides policy for a wide range of community issues and guides future choices about land use and urban services in the Boulder Valley. During a major update process, it is typical and recommended that policymakers identify a series of "Focus Areas." Identifying Focus Areas will help the community focus on key issues and manage the scope of community conversation. It will help the project team prioritize work for evaluating and updating Plan policy to reflect the latest community feedback, as well as important local, regional and national trends. The key questions for the members of the four bodies at this Working Session include:

- 1. Which topics should the project team prioritize as Focus Areas for the major update?
- 2. Are there any topics that have not been identified in this memo or staff presentation that should also be considered as Focus Areas?

BACKGROUND

The Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan

<u>The Plan</u> is a document that identifies the Boulder Valley's long-term vision and sets policy intended to move the community toward that vision. The Plan also guides land management and community growth within the Boulder Valley by setting expectations through policies and the <u>Future Land Use Map</u>.

The city and county are currently engaged in a major update to the Plan. This is the eighth major update of the Plan since it was adopted around 50 years ago. Major updates provide the community with an opportunity to adjust the Plan to reflect changing community values and needs, address current challenges and proactively plan for the future.

Roles and Responsibilities

The community's elected leaders on the Boulder City Council and the Boulder County Board of County Commissioners along with the city's appointed Planning Board and county's Planning Commission adopt updates to the Plan through a series of meetings and public hearings. Throughout the process, the project team will seek guidance from these governmental bodies on potential updates to the Plan that are in line with community feedback and represent current best practice to address challenges facing the Boulder Valley.

A BOULDER TODAY – PHASE 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

The purpose of this first phase of work is to build common understanding about the state of the Boulder Valley today. The project team sourced city and county data, data from important partners such as the U.S. Census Bureau, State Demography Office, the Denver Regional Council of Governments and other local organizations, such as Growing Up Boulder, to build a picture of how well the Boulder Valley currently aligns with the goals identified in the Sustainability, Equity and Resilience Framework (SER Framework). Beyond the valuable quantitative data collected about the Boulder Valley, the project team also collected important feedback from community members about Boulder Today. This qualitative information provides a window into community interests, concerns about the current environment and hopes for the future.

This information has been compiled for the community at <u>A Boulder Today</u>. This online platform provides basic information about how the community has evolved. The site also includes seven "Storymaps" or snapshots of each community goal defined in the SER Framework, diving into questions and topics of interest frequently posed by community members. This foundational information provides a common understanding of the community as it currently exists and will be the starting point for seeking alternatives and opinions in future outreach conversations.

Please visit <u>A Boulder Today</u> to learn more about the analysis of current conditions. What We Are Beginning to Hear from the Community

The project team is striving for this BVCP update to be the most inclusive to date. Our goal is for all community members, including city and county decision-makers, to hear the perspectives of diverse voices from the Boulder Valley. A variety of engagement

tactics are being used to reach our historically excluded community members, including but not limited to the Community Assembly; collaboration with community members and local artists to co-design engagement and remove barriers to participation; involvement of Community Connectors; focused consultations; and language access, among others. During this first phase of work, the project team engaged community members at two inperson events and one online opportunity over a period of three months. Staff have also received communication from community members through the project website (aboulderfuture.org) comment form and project email (future@bouldercolorado.gov). Over 500 people have participated thus far. A summary of engagement collected is included as **Attachment A**. To review the full breadth of community feedback collected to date in this project, visit the Community Comment Log. In addition to these recent events, the team has also reviewed community input collected through a variety of other city and county projects and touchpoints, including:

- Statistically valid surveys such as the 2023 Community Survey Report of Results and the 2021 Primary Employer Survey Report of Results
- Project-based engagement summaries from recent citywide projects such as the
 Arts and Culture Needs and Funding Assessment, Boulder Social Streets, Airport
 Community Conversation, Climate Tax Ballot Measure, Water Efficiency Plan,
 Civic Area Phase 2, the Reimagine Policing Plan and recent code update projects,
 among others.
- The Community Connectors-in-Residence Mid-Year Update (2024)

Major Themes of Phase 1: A Boulder Today

A number of themes are emerging in community responses. These are summarized below together with some information and potential insights from the existing conditions analysis.

1. Community members are prioritizing the advancement of Boulder's Livability, Environmental Sustainability and Safety goals.

Of the seven community goals described in the SER Framework, participants in the first phase of the process have indicated that the top three goal areas for the next Plan update should be Livable, Environmentally Sustainable and Safe.

Within **Livable**, we've heard particular community interest in the areas of affordable living and housing density and diversity. The existing conditions analysis reveals that there are approximately 58,000 homes in the Boulder Valley. These include a mix of detached dwelling units, attached homes, apartments and condominiums, manufactured homes and accessory dwelling units. Since the last major update to the Plan in 2015, approximately 3,000 multi-unit dwellings have been added to the community (or an average of about 300 units per year). About half of the homes in the city's service area are apartments or condominiums and around 40% are single unit homes. This mix is similar to some peer cities, although Fort Collins, Colorado has a higher proportion of single unit detached homes (about 60%) and a lower proportion of multi-unit homes (about 30%). To learn more about housing diversity and other objectives of the Livable goal, please visit the **Livable snapshot**.

Related to the **Environmentally Sustainable** goal, community members describe interests in prioritizing climate action and planning for future supply and demand of our water resources. Both the city and county are committed to enabling climate action among all community members, relying on a mixture of local partnerships and government action. Boulder has cut community-wide carbon pollution by 24% since the 2018 baseline and 41% since the city began tracking emissions in 2005. Compared to peer cities, Boulder has done well at keeping its emissions lower since dipping during the initial height of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020. Local emissions reductions reflect meaningful improvements in energy efficiency and fuel switching in buildings and community mode shifts in transportation. For more information about the local climate, water resources and ecosystems, visit the **Environmentally Sustainable snapshot**.

Desired community advancements for a **Safe** community moving forward include attention to crime and public safety as well as keeping pedestrians and cyclists safe. Community perception of public safety has declined in recent years, however, Boulder's crime rate is lower than all peer cities studied as part of the existing conditions analysis and markedly lower than the national crime rate. While crime rates are relatively low, there has been a change in the number of offenses in the city and where these offenses take place, with increased criminal activity happening along the 28th street corridor, as one example. To learn more about crime, crashes and other issues of safety, such as natural disasters, visit the **Safe snapshot**.

2. Community members highly value opportunities for greater social connections through gathering spaces and activities.

The project received a lot of community input to date surrounding the idea of social connection, gathering and the need to strengthen community connections. Boulder County Public Health reports that the community's overall well-being is less stable than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic. While community data indicates that Boulder's reputation for excellent physical health is valid, the team found that Boulder also has a higher rate of depression, with 24% of residents affected, compared to a 21% national average. Another issue that impacts well-being, loneliness, has become more pronounced in recent years. The U.S. Surgeon General has issued an <u>Advisory on a National Loneliness Epidemic</u>. The advisory calls for communities to increase and strengthen social connection to combat the epidemic.

When asked about "finding community" within Boulder, community members indicated that open space and trails were the top location to connect with others. These cherished community places also offer opportunities to connect with nature, which has been documented as an important benefit for mental health. Other venues that community members identified as important for social connection include food and drink establishments, parks, and health and fitness centers as well as local affinity, advocacy or charity groups. To learn more, visit the Healthy and Socially Thriving snapshot.

3. When envisioning the future of Boulder, community members describe a place that acts as a beacon of equity, climate action, and vibrancy.

When asked to describe their hopes and dreams for the future of Boulder, community members wrote passionately about Boulder serving the greater nation (and world!) as a place that demonstrates adaptation to a changing climate and care for the natural world. Additionally, many community members described a future where they were part of a diverse community; could live affordably no matter their age, with access to quality homes, food and transportation; and would feel warm and friendly connections to neighbors. The local economy plays an important role in the vitality community members desire. A survey of Boulder businesses indicates that over 80% were generally optimistic about the city's economic future and nearly three-fourths were satisfied with Boulder as a place to do business. One of the challenges that businesses face locally is the cost of doing business, particularly the cost of space. The average cost per square foot for leasing space in the city is more expensive than the average cost in the county (outside the city). This is particularly true for retail space, where the dollar per square foot rental rate in the third quarter of 2024 was more than 16% higher in the city than in the county. To learn more about the local economy, visit the Economically Vital snapshot.

Access to high quality transportation options and a desire to transition the community's dependency on cars was another widely supported concept that came through in community comments about the future of the Boulder Valley. The city has been tracking how people move in and around Boulder for decades. The proportion of people moving in cars has steadily decreased since the 1990s and the proportion of people moving by bike has increased. The organization PeopleforBikes compares the bicycle network of more than 2,500 cities worldwide. According to this ranking, the quality of the bike network in Boulder is better than all peer cities studied. Visit the Accessible and Connected snapshot to learn more about Boulder's connectivity.

4. Many community members would like to understand more about Boulder's potential for growth.

When community members were asked "What else would you like to know about Boulder Today?" many of the responses described interest in understanding if and how the area could and/or should grow in the future. Community members want a greater understanding of the capacity of the area's infrastructure to support growing populations and how changes in policy surrounding growth could impact the community and quality of life. As the process moves forward, these will be important questions to study in collaboration with regional partners. Evaluating how the community manages future growth and the potential effects of changes is within the scope of work for this update and sharing that information will be an important element of data-driven decision making, a key objective of the **Responsibly Governed** goal. Visit the **Responsibly Governed snapshot** to learn more about local collaboration and other efforts to improve community satisfaction with city and county governments.

Peer Cities

Throughout the seven existing condition snap shots you will find comparisons made to other cities. These peer cities were chosen because they have a comparable population, include a local university, and have other similar demographic features which makes them useful references for comparison. The peer cities studied during this phase of work include Ann Arbor, Michigan; Fort Collins, Colorado; Bellingham, Washington; Eugene, Oregon; and Madison, Wisconsin.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND POSSIBLE FOCUS AREAS

As described, community participation so far has indicated that issues related to Livability, Environmental Sustainability and Safety are the top priorities for community members. Below is a list of the most common topics raised by community members during Phase 1 engagement organized by each goal. Policy makers will be asked to discuss these issues and provide the project team with feedback on Focus Areas for the Phase 2 of the project. During Phase 2, the project team will work with the community to confirm the prioritized Focus Areas and begin homing in on the overarching framework for the Comprehensive Plan.

Higher Priority Issues: The following topics received the most community interest in the process so far.

Livable

- Affordable Living affordable living and affordable access to high quality
 housing, food, and transportation were commonly cited concerns among
 community members. Particularly, when describing the future, community
 members expressed concerns about the community's aging population and
 expressed that they are seeking creative solutions for how these essential elements
 of wellbeing can be accessed by older community members on fixed incomes.
- Housing Density and Diversity consistent with other projects' engagement processes over recent years, this is a top concern from community members on both sides of the issue. The project team heard from many community members who want to explore more and different housing options for the community. There were also many community members who expressed concern about the impacts of increased densities and changes to existing neighborhoods. Further exploration of the community's needs across the Boulder Valley is an important topic particularly as it relates to housing and infrastructure policies, including consideration of the Area III-Planning Reserve.

Environmentally Sustainable

 Climate Action – Community members express the importance of adapting to climate change and have great interests in energy - expanding renewable energy and exploring electric microgrids. Another area of interest that received a lot of

- community comments includes advancing the circular economy, particularly looking into food systems. Other topics of interest within the realm of Climate Action include sustainable urban design and support for natural infrastructure, particularly trees and the urban canopy.
- Water Resources Related to the essential resource of water, some community members expressed concern about the community's ability to provide water to a growing population. There is also an interest in water conservation and reducing water pollution.
- Open Space Preservation and access to open space resources, especially as the community grows and changes, was described by many community members as a very important issue for the Plan.

Safety

- Crime and Public Safety Community members are describing crime as a major challenge to address. Crimes related to drug use are often mentioned in community comments. Some community members have described the fear of crime and a perceived lack of public safety as being impactful on the vibrancy of certain neighborhoods in the city, particularly commercial areas like downtown.
- Pedestrian and Bike Safety The provision of safe bike routes throughout the
 community received a lot of community comments, with the mention of
 challenges associated with particular roadways or intersections often identified.
 Providing safe routes for children and those with disabilities was also mentioned
 often by community members as an important topic to address in this plan update.

Medium Priority Issues: These topics received many community comments, but not as many as the high priority issues.

Healthy and Socially Thriving

- Arts and Culture Creating supportive systems for the arts and artists received
 many community comments. Community members highlighted the value of the
 creative economy to Boulder and also described a desire for more places for
 creative experiences.
- Local Food and Agriculture Supporting sustainable agricultural practices and the preservation of land for agriculture was described by community members as important areas of focus for the Plan. Additionally, expanding access to a variety of healthy food was mentioned by a number of participants
- Social Connection and Gathering Providing space for social connection and programming for mental health received some community comments. Some comments describe the importance of multi-generational spaces and housing opportunities for greater social connection.

Accessible and Connected

 Transportation and Mobility Options —Providing alternatives to travel by automobile was a top issue in this category. Many community members mentioned a need for increased frequency of RTD transit services as a particular area for improvement. • Walkable 15-minute Neighborhoods – On the topic of walkable neighborhoods, community comments were focused on the provision of high-quality facilities, like sidewalks, multi-use paths and bike paths.

Lower Priority Issues: The following topic areas received less feedback during this first phase of engagement.

Responsibly Governed

- Community Engagement Community comments about engagement encouraged
 a variety of methods to reach many people in the community, with particular
 interest in participatory design and randomized participation in advisory groups to
 generate new ideas. Some community members identified that prioritizing
 engagement with historically excluded community members is important.
- *Transparent decision making* Community members describe a desire for transparency and accountability in city programs and funding as well as providing multiple communications channels to engage the public.

Economically Vital

- Commercial Area Vibrancy Comments describe a desire to keep downtown areas clean and safe. Some community members also mention the need to fill vacant spaces in commercial areas.
- Local Business and Industry Comments received about local business and
 industry encourage support for participation in a circular economy and an interest
 in growing Boulder's scientific and technical start-up businesses. Comments also
 mention encouraging public-private partnerships to engage in creative
 placemaking and development.

TRENDS

While not identified by community members as important issues to address at this update, there are some additional topics that policy makers might consider as the project moves forward.

The Future of Work – Shifts in the workplace have been felt at multiple levels in the Boulder Valley. Peak hour congestion along routes into and out of Boulder have decreased since a significant shift by many to remote work. This also means that fewer people are working in the Valley on a daily basis, leaving an impact on local businesses – particularly in the food and beverage sector and commercial real estate – principally office space in the downtown area. How this continues to evolve transportation networks and neighborhoods throughout Boulder may be an important issue for policymakers to study.

Digital Fatigue – National conversations about the need to balance the benefits of technology with protection of youth mental health and general community well-being is playing out locally as well. On November 19, 2024, the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) Board of Education voted to update the district's cell phone policy, prohibiting high school students from using their phones during school hours on campus, including during passing periods and lunch. Growing Up Boulder, through their recent work on the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative have identified that bullying online is being

described by local youth as impactful to their mental health, with BIPOC and LGBTQ students impacted more. Additionally, the group is discovering that BVSD teens spend more than three hours a day on screens for purposes other than schoolwork.

Climate Impacts on the Insurance Market – Insurance providers are raising rates in many areas due to the increased risks of natural disasters which has an impact on affordability. In other parts of the county, some providers are refusing insurance for homes located in hazardous areas. As the Boulder Valley is at risk for both flood and fire, how local governments regulate at-risk areas and help local homeowners mitigate these risks may be a worthwhile conversation.

Diverse Communities - In 2018, for the first time in U.S. history, no single race constituted a majority among children under the age of 18. This means the combined population of non-white children surpassed the number of white children in this age group. Locally, in Boulder County, youth populations are also becoming more diverse. How the community evolves to include and support the belonging of a wider variety of cultures with the evolving population could be a valuable community conversation during this process.

NEXT STEPS

The community input thus far has been full of a variety of ideas and issues that can be further explored. We know that you, as elected and appointed officials, are out in the community hearing feedback and details on various topics and issues. This is why we need to hear from you on the key questions introduced at the beginning of the memo:

- 1. Which topics should the project team prioritize as Focus Areas for the major update?
- 2. Are there any topics haven't been identified in this memo or staff presentation that should also be considered as Focus Areas?

The feedback provided by policymakers at this session will inform the identification of Focus Areas for the Plan update. These Focus Areas will help organize community conversations around the most pressing issues, serve as a primary focus of policy study, and guide subsequent work in Phase 3 of the project. Policymakers will receive an information packet in late March with an update on community engagement, community feedback and suggested Focus Areas. Phase 2 of the project is slated for completion by May 2025, when "Big Ideas" for the future of the Boulder Valley are described in a policy framework that will begin to then direct the analysis of different policy options during Phase 3.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- 1. A Boulder Today Existing Conditions Analysis
- 2. Full Community Comment Log (through Jan. 21, 2025)

ATTACHMENTS

A. BVCP Phase 1 Engagement Summary

Phase 1 Engagement Summary

August 2024 – December 2024





Phase 1 Purpose

The purpose of Phase 1 was to orient the community to the Comprehensive Plan update process, build excitement, communicate the importance of participating, and set expectations for future engagement

Phase 1 was launched by sharing information about the process and asking questions about community priorities, social connection, big ideas, hopes and dreams for the Boulder Valley, and what our community wants to learn more about

Communication & Engagement Tactics

Two tactics were used during this phase, including:

- City-wide What's Up Boulder open house
- Community Kickoff open house and online questionnaire

These events were communicated via:

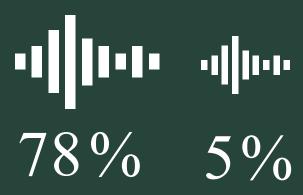
- social media
- outreach through Community Connectors-in-Residence
- newsletters
- Inside Boulder News
- utility bill inserts
- posters (at city rec centers and several trailheads throughout the Boulder Valley)

The City and County are in the process of making all websites and applications more accessible. While much progress has been made, some features in this document may be inaccessible for certain people. If you would like assistance accessing this document, please contact the project email address: further bouldercolorado.gov or call (303) 441-4124

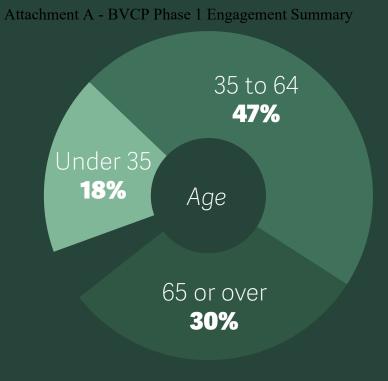
Who we heard from

550

People were engaged in-person and online



Identified as White Identified as Hispanic or Latino/a



3% Identified as Asian

2% Identified as Two or more Races

1% Identified as Black or African American

How will this feedback be used?

Feedback received during Phase 1 helped identify what existing conditions community members were interested in learning more about. The comments also provided early indicators to inform a revised community vision and set of focus areas for the Comprehensive Plan update

What about past recent engagement?

The project team is also considering feedback received during previous recent engagement efforts. These include several recent department plans, Community Connectors-in-Residence, the 2024 and 2025 Annual Budget, Lifelong Boulder and Growing Up Boulder's efforts across many different youth led projects over the last 10 years, including its most recent effort around the Child Friendly City Initiative (CFCI)



What's Up Boulder

September 8, 2024

Rest Boulder

Community Center

~100 Participants

what we heard – 5 key takeaways

The most used words to describe Boulder Today were:

Community Nature

Beauty Exciting

Fun Fitness

Accessible Safe

Kind Energetic

Community members described Boulder in three words - and learned about the BVCP and how to stay involved in the process

Attachment A - BVCP Phase 1 Engagement Summary

event summary









Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Community Kick-Off & Online Questionnaire



~210 Attendees 248 online responses

what we heard - 5 key takeaways

1. Community members are prioritizing the advancement of Boulder's LIVABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY and SAFETY goals

Within these goal areas, community members feel the following topics need the most attention:

- Affordable living, including housing density and diversity
- Environmental sustainability, including climate action and water resources (supply and demand) planning
- Safety, including crime and public safety, and pedestrian and bicycle safety

Attachment A - BVCP Phase 1 Engagement Summary **EVENT SUMMARY**

The Community Kick-off Event was an open house for all community members. The event included a presentation of local demographic trends by the State Demographer and an interactive performance by MOTUS, a local theater group

Community members also had the opportunity to meet with project team members and provide feedback at seven stations, each focused on a different topic





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Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Community Kick-Off & Online Questionnaire



what we heard – 5 key takeaways

2. When envisioning the future of Boulder, community members have described a place that acts as a model for ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, and a DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE who have ACCESS TO HOMES, SERVICES, and opportunities to make SOCIAL CONNECTION with others

The community wrote passionately about Boulder serving the greater nation (and world!) as a place that demonstrates adaptation to a changing climate and care for the natural world. Additionally, many described a future where they were part of a diverse community; could live affordably no matter their age, with access to quality homes, food and transportation; and have the opportunity make friendly connections with neighbors





Attachment A - BVCP Phase 1 Engagement Summary **EVENT SUMMARY**

The Community Kick-off Event was an open house for all community members. The event included a presentation of local demographic trends by the State Demographer and an interactive performance by MOTUS, a local theater group

Community members also had the opportunity to meet with project team members and provide feedback at seven stations, each focused on a different topic

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Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Community Kick-Off & Online Questionnaire



what we heard – 5 key takeaways

3. When community members were asked to offer a "Big Idea" for Boulder's future, participants dug in on some of Boulder's greatest challenges – particularly AFFORDABLE HOUSING, DIVERSITY and INCLUSIVITY, COMMUNITY CONNECTION and CLIMATE CHANGE

Here are a few interesting ideas from community members:

"Add an "information environment" element to the BVCP alongside built and natural environments. Emphasize importance of technology for emergency management and comms. Open data for transparency."

"Work with older adults who would like to work. Small single senior housing."

"Connect CU, the Hill and Downtown by moving Broadway underground and creating a walkable and bikeable space on the surface."



"Programs to help young single mothers navigate and exit poverty. I would love to help in creating this effort to create a community where we pair mentors with families in need."





Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Community Kick-Off & Online Questionnaire



what we heard - 5 key takeaways

4. Community open spaces and trails remain highly valued assets as community space

When asked about 'finding community' within Boulder, community members indicated that OPEN SPACE and TRAILS were the top location to connect with others. Other important places for experiencing connection include FOOD & DRINK establishments, PARKS and HEALTH and FITNESS CENTERS

5. Many community members would like to understand more about Boulder's potential for growth

When community members were asked "What else would you like to know about Boulder Today?" many of the responses described interest in understanding if and how the Boulder Valley could and/ or should grow in the future. Community members want a greater understanding of the capacity of infrastructure to support growing populations and how change in policy surrounding growth could impact the community and its valued quality of life







Community Connectors-in-Residence (CC-in-R)



what we heard – 5 key takeaways

CC-in-R shared great ideas for promoting engagement opportunities – e.g. through BVSD communication channels, Clinica Family Health and more

CC-in-R suggested that the BVCP team collect data from our local organizations serving under resourced communities for a more complete picture of our community today

CC-in-R expressed a desire to have ongoing, in-depth consultations throughout the process with the BVCP team



Attachment A - BVCP Phase 1 Engagement Summary **EVENT SUMMARY**

BVCP team had a first consultation with Community Connectors-in-Residence (CC-in-R) with these goals:

- provide an overview of the BVCP update process,
- gather ideas on how best to promote engagement events to diverse communities
- seek CC-in-R feedback on how they want to be engaged in this process



Phase 2 Engagesocht Sumary

January 2025 - February 2025

Thank you for providing your input during Phase 1!

Phase 2 is now underway!

Please check out the <u>Boulder Valley</u>
<u>Comprehensive Plan website</u> for more information about the plan and details on how to stay involved, including upcoming opportunities to engage with us!

