



Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Update The Report of **COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY** on 15-Minute Neighborhoods



**A BOULDER
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BOULDER VALLEY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

**COMMUNITY
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What Policy Makers Should Know: Executive Summary

Boulder's first Community Assembly is a group of 43 randomly selected community members from across the Boulder Valley, reflecting the perspectives and diversity of Boulder and unincorporated Boulder County. They met for seven full-day meetings held in English and Spanish from May-October 2025. The assembly learned from experts and each other as they deliberated about their mandate to make recommendations about implementing 15-minute neighborhoods as part of the Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan).

The Community Assembly defined 15-minute neighborhoods *for Boulder*. **Boulder's 15-minute neighborhoods are diverse, inclusive, connected communities where services and amenities are easily and equitably accessible for pedestrians of all abilities.** This definition highlights how neighborhoods create a sense of belonging. Boulder's 15-minute neighborhoods should enable connection between folks with different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds living in the same neighborhood.

To enable the Community Assembly's vision for diverse, inclusive, and connected communities, 15-minute neighborhoods need **four essential services: a community center, groceries and food, parks and green space, and a mobility hub.** As the report details, there are multiple ways these services may appear in different neighborhoods, but all of them are essential to a 15-minute neighborhood. The assembly provided a list of eight **secondary services** that enhance 15-minute neighborhoods.

Boulder's 15-minute neighborhoods are **mixed density**, meaning they include a range of housing types within the same neighborhood. The assembly resisted the tendency to frame density as either good or bad. Instead, they imagined 15-minute neighborhoods that *rely* on the interactions between people and businesses that comes from having a range of densities close to each other. 15-minute neighborhoods have **mixed density and mixed income** within the same neighborhood.

The Community Assembly identified **six values** to guide and ground their discussions: **equity, a bolder economy, connected and open community, inclusion, sustainability, and well-being.** Because equity was central to other values, the assembly named equity their organizing value.

In the process of developing their definition and recommendations, the assembly grappled with whether 15-minute neighborhoods could fit their values. Their discussions named ways Boulder has long been exclusive, inaccessible, and inequitable. Assembly members shared stories about struggling to find housing or needing to avoid neighborhood schools due to histories of racism and prejudice. The assembly deliberated about whether 15-minute neighborhoods could be done in ways that were truly equitable. Could 15-minute neighborhoods *remain* inclusive instead of displacing residents through gentrification? Assembly members questioned whether Boulder should focus on select problems (e.g., affordable housing, simplifying codes, public transit) instead of pursuing 15-minute neighborhoods.

As the assembly learned about land use planning, they recognized the complexity of "implementing" 15-minute neighborhoods. The Community Assembly's definition requires housing types and businesses that don't currently exist together. 15-minute neighborhoods need neighborhood-serving businesses; yet opening a small business in Boulder is expensive and difficult,



requiring prospective business owners to navigate complex code requirements if they are able to find an affordable commercial space. Housing that is accessible and affordable for a mixed income neighborhood will require ongoing public investments and subsidies.

15-minute neighborhoods will require more than just policy changes. They will require community support and actions. Many of these actions will need to work against economic trends such as relying on ecommerce and home delivery.

Seven challenges and six opportunities are named in the last section of this report as reminders of some of the more undesirable outcomes that could come from pursuing 15-minute neighborhoods in Boulder. Decision-makers and staff should consider these challenges and opportunities throughout the next twenty years of implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

The assembly chose **Housing Choice and Opportunity** and **Inclusive Local Economy** as their focus areas. This choice set the agenda: 15-minute neighborhoods in Boulder need to have accessible, affordable housing and local businesses that provide inclusive opportunities to build wealth. These are ambitious goals—but they also reflect the assembly's organizing value of equity.

The assembly provides **nine recommendations connected to these focus areas**, including these highlights with the strongest support:

- 15-minute neighborhoods should be mixed income. Like mixed density, 15-minute neighborhoods should include low, middle, and high-income housing. Boulder already has high-income housing; low and middle-income housing should be supported through city and county programs to facilitate and subsidize building.
- People want to create businesses in Boulder who struggle to find spaces; there are vacant commercial spaces. The city should pilot a range of creative ways to address this problem.
- Support in-home businesses by reducing the regulations and barriers to starting them.
- Create neighborhood-level economy support navigator programs with community involvement to advise about how to open and operate a business in the neighborhood, including navigating city codes and requirements.

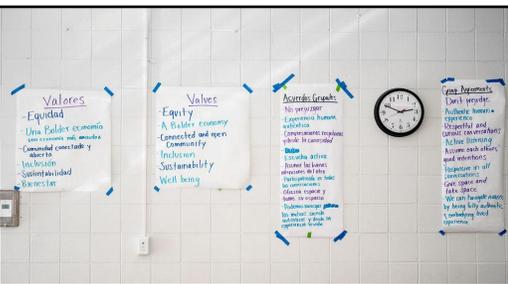
The assembly also made several **additional recommendations** for implementation that are not directly tied to a focus area. These recommendations center the importance of taking action to ensure **accessibility**:

- 15-minute neighborhoods should have city support for ongoing snow removal and yard overgrowth so that sidewalks, crosswalks, and streets are safe and accessible for everyone across all seasons.
- Conduct accessibility audits within 15-minute neighborhoods to identify infrastructure that is inaccessible and develop specific plans to reduce barriers.

The assembly offers principles, which together, provide planners a way of determining where to focus attention on selecting **where to foster 15-minute neighborhoods**:

- Find mixed density housing and businesses or spaces to develop them.
- Use the City's equity index to select priority areas.
- Select areas with a moderate number of services required by 15-minute neighborhoods.

Community Assembly Overview



Community Assemblies are a democratic process in which individuals are selected to come together to learn and solve problems. Participants are selected through a civic lottery. The assembly comes together to examine a specific issue and develop recommendations for their government decision-makers to consider and implement.

Boulder's first Community Assembly was tasked with considering 15-minute neighborhoods as part of the **Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan**. Their mandate was: **How, and where, can we implement 15-minute neighborhoods? Together, the members of the Assembly will define 15-minute neighborhoods in the Boulder Valley; consider opportunities and challenges; and make recommendations to policymakers about how and where they should be implemented.**

A 15-minute neighborhood is commonly defined as a place where people can access most of their daily needs within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. The Community Assembly was tasked with refining this general idea into a definition that fit the needs and values of Boulder residents. The need for an assembly on this topic evolved from recognition that while 15-minute neighborhoods have been in the Comprehensive Plan for over 10 years, implementation has been slow. Community input through an assembly could meaningfully shape implementation.

The Community Assembly was randomly selected based on the population in the area. Invitations to volunteer for this assembly were mailed to 10,000 homes in Boulder and unincorporated Boulder County. The city held information sessions and did outreach through Community Connectors and a few local organizations to provide a context for these invitations. Over 230 people responded to these invitations and volunteered to be part of the Community Assembly. The assembly was randomly selected from these volunteers based on demographic categories to represent Boulder Valley's population (detailed on [page 7](#)).

The assembly met for seven Saturdays between May 2025 and October 2025. In total, the assembly worked together for over 50 hours to meet their mandate: define 15-minute neighborhoods for Boulder, identify principles for locating them, and make recommendations for implementation.



Understanding the Community Assembly Process

The assembly met for seven full day meetings. Early in the process, these meetings focused on learning about 15-minute neighborhoods. As the assembly learned more, they identified additional information that they needed, and experts were invited to address the assembly's questions as the group deliberated about challenges and opportunities of 15-minute neighborhoods in Boulder.

The assembly meetings included multiple modalities: small group discussion, presentations to the whole assembly, individual written responses, small group written responses, advocacy to the full assembly, bilingual small group discussion, embodied activities, playful construction of neighborhoods. The specific presentations and modalities from each meeting are detailed on [pages 31 - 35](#).

As the process progressed, the assembly balanced imagining possibilities and deliberating over trade-offs. The final meetings focused on finalizing definitions, recommendations, principles for location, challenges, and opportunities. This report includes the ideas generated by the assembly that sustained support from at least half at the assembly. The recommendations include the results of the final vote in support and against each item.



Boulder's Community Assembly

Section 1: Who We Are



Boulder's Community Assembly started with 48 and finished with 43 participants. One person was added in the second meeting, replacing a member who never attended. Across the assembly, several folks dropped out of the assembly due to injury and life events that kept them from attending multiple meetings. Forty-three participants attended the final meeting.

The assembly was selected based on a representation model. The next page shows the demographic categories within the representation model, the current Boulder population

by category, the target range for the assembly composition, and the final assembly composition. The assembly was created by target ranges since individuals represent multiple demographic categories within the assembly.



Boulder's Assembly

Assembly Representation Model Targets & Final Assembly Makeup

■ Percentage of Boulder Population ■ Percentage of Assembly

Categories	Identities	Percentage Comparison	Assembly Target Range	Assembly Makeup	
Gender	Man	52% (Pop) 42% (Ass)	20 - 25	18	
	Woman	49% (Pop) 53% (Ass)	21 - 25	23	
	Self-Described	1% (Pop) 1% (Ass)	3 - 4	2	
Age Range	16-19	14% (Pop) 14% (Ass)	5 - 7	6	
	20-34	42% (Pop) 30% (Ass)	17 - 23	13	
	35-54	23% (Pop) 30% (Ass)	9 - 13	13	
	55-64	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	4 - 6	4	
	65+	14% (Pop) 16% (Ass)	6 - 8	7	
	Boulder Valley Planning Area	Area I - City of Boulder	81% (Pop) 86% (Ass)	39	37
Area I City of Boulder	Central Boulder	17% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	4 - 7	4	
	South Boulder	14% (Pop) 19% (Ass)	4 - 6	8	
	North Boulder/Palo Park	23% (Pop) 16% (Ass)	7 - 11	7	
	Southeast Boulder	11% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	2 - 5	4	
	Gunbarrel	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	2 - 5	4	
	Colorado University/Hill	18% (Pop) 14% (Ass)	5 - 8	6	
	Corossroads/East Boulder	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	2 - 5	4	
	Area II & III Boulder County	Area II & III - Boulder County	19% (Pop) 12% (Ass)	9	5
Area II & III Boulder County	Area II	12% (Pop) 12% (Ass)	3 - 9	1	
	Area III (Annex, Rural Preservation, Planning Reserve)	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	0 - 3	4	
	Race/Ethnicity*	White	77% (Pop) 63% (Ass)	30 - 36	27
Race/Ethnicity*	Black	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	3 - 4	4	
	Asian, American Indian, Other races, Two or more races	13% (Pop) 12% (Ass)	5 - 9	5	
	Latino/x/e	12% (Pop) 26% (Ass)	7 - 10	11	
	Other diversity	LGBTQ+	14% (Pop) 14% (Ass)	3 - 10	6
Other diversity	Self-Identified Disabled	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	3 - 7	4	
	Housing Status	Live in manufactured/mobile home (renter or owner)	9% (Pop) 9% (Ass)	3 - 6	4
	Renter (other than manufactured/mobile home)	48% (Pop) 48% (Ass)	21 - 25	22	
Housing Status	Owner (other than manufactured home)	52% (Pop) 52% (Ass)	20 - 25	17	

Target range was for 48 members. Since five folks left the assembly, some of the actual numbers are outside of the target range because folks could not finish the assembly.

* Assembly members could note more than one of these race/ethnicity categories due to how the questions were asked. Thus, the numbers are higher than the assembly itself.

Assembly Members (A - Z)

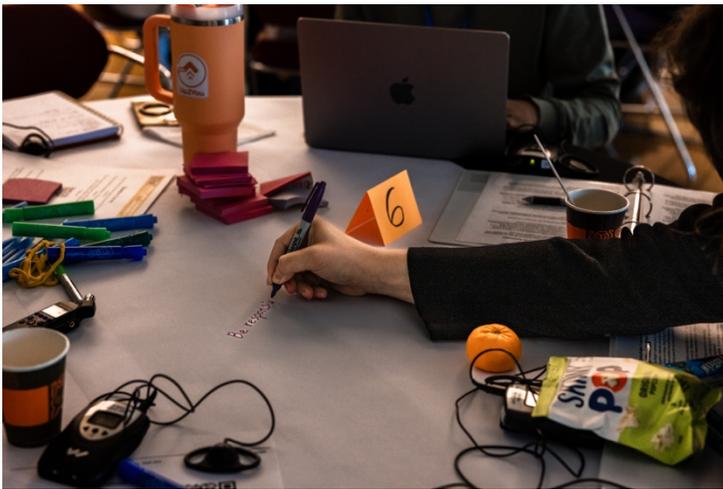
Alejandra Nieland Zavala	Alexander Ray	Amelia Grayson
Andres Padilla	Atzin Barrios Palacios Luna	Cait McQuade
Cooper Hollister	Craig McDonald	Cristina Segura
Deborah Janeczko	Delaney Lloyd	Ellen Weekley
Elsa Cardona	Garrett Rue	Gary Derr
Guillermo Patino	James Carpenter	Jamillah Richmond
Joel Lenorovitz	Johana Valle	Josh Livingston
Judith King	Judson Wells	Katherine Hitchcock
Keaton Smith	Lily Smigelski	Luis Reyes
Maria Esther Pena	Maria Mestas	Marjorie Johnson
Paul Owen	Peggy Barrett	Rahma Mian
Rosaura Martinez	Rylee Bennett	Shane Enzensperger
Stephen Gesick	Tiffany Willis	Tori Gilbertson
Travis Culley	Vivek Krishnamurthy	Yordanos Loyer
Zoe Quaintance		

Peter Job, Susan Lowell, Jacob Salas, and Thibaud Teil all contributed to multiple assembly meetings and informed this report despite not being able to finish the full assembly.



Section 2: Why We Volunteered

Assembly members shared multiple reasons for volunteering to be part of Boulder's first Community Assembly. They recognized an opportunity to be involved in their community and local government; the assembly was an opportunity to participate and guide Boulder's future. They were intrigued that the government wanted to hear from the community this way.



Multiple participants recognized this as a new experience that fascinated them. Yes, the assembly was a new innovation in public engagement for Boulder. But it was also something that they had never done before. They were curious when the information card showed up in the mail. For one participant, it was a way for a relative newcomer to Boulder to join in Boulder's reputation of being community-driven. Facing a terminal illness, another assembly member volunteered to take on meaningful, challenging work to stay

engaged with people and motivated to continue thinking of the future.

The desire to be involved in local politics was particularly powerful at a moment when national politics seems bleak. People want to be doing something—the assembly was a way to make politics more equitable and compassionate.

Several people mentioned the topic of the assembly as their motivation. Folks were interested in planning and land-use. They wanted to learn about 15-minute neighborhoods. Assembly members mentioned living in 15-minute neighborhoods already and enjoying the availability of services they offer. Other folks were concerned about prevailing views of density as a fix-all and wanted to participate to represent a different view. People sensed their political leanings and identities would make them a minority in the assembly, and wanted to participate to ensure the voices they represented were heard. Participants also mentioned topics beyond 15-minute neighborhoods that deeply concerned them, such as industrial pollution at Rocky Flats.

Participants volunteered because it offered an opportunity for personal development. Serving on the assembly fit university majors and professional aspirations. Participants wanted to improve their public speaking and deliberation skills.



Participating in the assembly allowed folks to join with other community members—to appreciate their perspectives and meet new people they would not normally meet. The assembly made people feel like they are part of the Boulder community.

Several folks mentioned that compensation for participating made it easier to participate. They sensed that people will be involved in local government if given the opportunity to participate and barriers to participation were removed.

Participants saw the assembly as a way to uphold their civic duties by participating in the democratic process. They believed in the power of community participation to build strong communities. They saw their participation as a form of giving thanks and contributing to shaping Boulder Valley's future.

I was motivated to be able to contribute my time and abilities to support projects that directly benefit the families and residents of our community.

I am passionate about politics and active democratic participation and uphold my civic duties as a citizen high.

I wanted to be a part of something that would be a lasting, positive, and permanent way of life for future generations.

Section 3: Our Assembly Experience

When asked to reflect on their assembly experiences in the last meeting, assembly members offered a full arc of emotions. This mix of emotions and moments reflects the process of learning and deliberating together during full-day meetings across six months.



Assembly members found their experience educational. They learned about 15-minute neighborhoods and planning. Yet they also learned a lot from their neighbors. They learned things about each other, including where other people's opinions come from. Assembly members reported gaining an appreciation of viewpoints, concerns, and values of people they otherwise have limited interaction. Assembly members lauded the diversity of perspectives within the room while some assembly members also thought that the conversations were too often dominated by the loudest voices with the most representation in Boulder.

"My opinion mattered during the assembly where opinions were given in different languages, and this was important to everyone."

"Thank you for this opportunity. It changed my opinion about Boulder government."

The assembly engaged in difficult deliberation. Assembly members reported feeling able to speak, some relying on facilitators to make space for their voices to be heard. People recognized the importance of deliberating together in both English and Spanish, appreciating support for both languages.



Yet sometimes assembly members felt there was too much focus on finding agreement and not enough time debating underlying disagreement. Many people reported feeling that they were listened to; a few people reported feeling disrespected and unheard. Many assembly members reported shifts in their views. For some this meant, changing their opinions. For others, the assembly provided new confirmation for their beliefs.

When asked if Boulder should hold another assembly, there was strong support for future assemblies. There were also suggestions about what should be different to learn from and improve on this assembly.

"I thought it was very successful both conceptually and in practice (except 8-hour days 😊). It is hard work and needs to be acknowledged."

"Wonderful to meet folks whose path I probably would not have crossed."



Section 4: Community Assembly Values

Across three meetings, the Community Assembly identified their values and defined them. This process ended up naming equity as the assembly's organizing value in recognition of how equity often appears in other values because it plays a central role in shaping these other values as well.

Equity

An equitable community balances and connects the diverse needs of people. Equity acknowledges that not all needs are equal.

A Bolder Economy

Diverse, equitable, and inclusive economies that focus on opportunities to flourish for all elements of the community to provide sustainable and regenerative present and future growth.

Connected and Open Community

A place where people can cultivate a sense of belonging and actively engage with, support, and resource one another. HOME.

Inclusion

A space to form a dignified, active, and sustainable life throughout all stages of life with economic accessibility, social participation, and cultural development.

Sustainability

Stewardship of the environment and the community that involves the preservation of open space, community space, an inviting and robust market space, for generations beyond.

Well-Being

To be able to prosper individually and collectively in a community that promotes health, activity, security, diversity, connectedness, and nature.

The assembly used these values to guide their deliberations. These values should also guide decision-makers as they implement 15-minute neighborhoods as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Section 5: Definition of a Boulder 15-Minute Neighborhood

The mandate asked the Community Assembly to define 15-minute neighborhoods for Boulder Valley. This question recognized that 15-minute neighborhoods can take a lot of different forms in different places. What should 15-minute neighborhoods mean in Boulder Valley?

This section provides the Community Assembly's answer. The assembly struggled over this definition because they recognized the importance of providing a definition for Boulder. This means that every word in the basic definition was carefully debated and carries weight. The assembly's definition departs from common definitions for 15-minute neighborhoods, and some of this thinking is explained in footnotes.

Readers can see the levels of support for the assembly's recommendations based on a final vote. The golden yellow bars show the final vote below each item, indicating the assembly members in support (golden) and against (black).

There were 43 members of the assembly. Some assembly members abstained from voting on select items so the vote totals may vary.

A Boulder 15-Minute Neighborhood

15-minute neighborhood: A diverse, inclusive, and connected community in which services and amenities are easily and equitably accessible within 15-minutes from home for pedestrians of all abilities.²

 Support  Against



² "Pedestrians of all abilities" includes walking, wheelchairs, and canes.

The assembly highlights that people walk different distances within 15-minutes.

The assembly decided not to include biking in the formal definition because it expands the distance in ways that are not accessible to everyone.

"Equitably accessible" means making sure that people with disabilities or other challenges can get the same services, resources, and opportunities as others.



15-minute neighborhoods have four essential services and amenities.³ A neighborhood needs all four of these to be considered a 15-minute neighborhood:

- Community Center
- Groceries and food
- Parks and green space
- Mobility hub

15-minute neighborhoods also have a set of secondary services and amenities. A 15-minute neighborhood needs 3 of these 8 secondary services and amenities:

- Community garden
- Library
- Medical services
- Public art spaces and interactive art
- Recreation center
- Restaurant
- Retail
- School

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15-minute neighborhoods are mixed density; they include areas of low, medium, and high-density housing. This includes the full range of housing types described within the Comprehensive Plan.⁴

A distinguishing feature of 15-minute neighborhoods is that this full range of housing types is present within the same neighborhood as well as a mix of neighborhood-serving businesses, mixed use, and economic hubs.

A 15-minute neighborhood is not high density; instead, it benefits from the interactions between people and businesses that come from having a range of densities in close proximity

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³The specific definitions of these services and amenities and the reasons why they are important for a 15-minute neighborhood appear on the next page. Because of how they were developed, the assembly voted on all of the essential and secondary services together as one item.

⁴The Comprehensive Plan discusses these housing types: single-unit houses; small multi-unit houses; accessory dwelling units (secondary residential unit that shares a building lot with a larger primary home); duplexes, triplexes, or four-plexes; and multi-unit buildings (apartments, condos, townhomes). 15-minute neighborhoods may also include other housing types such as cottage courts (small, detached homes arranged around a central courtyard, which include tiny homes) though these are not a requirement.



Essential Services Definitions

Community Center⁵

What counts: named community centers, schools that lease spaces, religious centers like churches, mosques, and Jewish community centers that invite folks in, senior centers. Community centers tend to be physical buildings, not just plazas.

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Community centers are a gathering place for neighbors that support a range of activities, ranging from play to celebration to learning through classes. They are seen as a place that meets community needs, sometimes by providing multiuse spaces and sometimes by housing other services (e.g., child care, health clinics, etc.). They can also become key emergency places during a crisis.

Groceries and Food

What counts: supermarkets, neighborhood stores, food pantries, farm shares/drop-offs, farmer's markets, farm stands

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Food security is a basic need. Groceries and food services provide a way to easily get food that is key to a healthy life. Having food and groceries within a neighborhood also makes it convenient.

Parks and Green Space

What counts: parks, playgrounds, green spaces, trees and benches, trailheads and trails

WHY is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Parks serve as a gathering place and a quiet place to be outside in nature. Parks provide spaces to release energy and places to regain energy. Parks are beautiful. They also provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and fun.

Mobility Hub⁶

What counts: Hubs that support multiple transit modalities to get around and beyond 15 MN. These hubs can include a bus stop, ebike dock, and tools together. This service includes clustering support for multiple modalities in a single area or transit in multiple directions.

⁵ The assembly recognized overlap between community centers, recreation centers, and libraries. This overlap is reflected in their definitions and why they are important. Indeed, the assembly meetings were held at the East Boulder Recreation Center, which would count as a community center, park and green space, and recreation center according to these definitions. Some assembly members wanted to consolidate these together while other assembly members recognized the value of distinct contributions that may be accomplished by different places in different neighborhoods, which is why they continued to receive support despite overlap.

⁶ The assembly originally called this a "transit hub." The city of Boulder typically considers transit hubs Park'n'Ride stations. Mobility Hubs is Boulder's term that matches the assembly's definition so we've adopted that term to avoid misinterpretation.



Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Mobility hubs support accessible transit, particularly for those who don't own cars, cannot walk long distances, or want to leave the neighborhood without cars. These hubs support multiple means of moving around the neighborhood and beyond. It recognizes that not all needs will be met within a 15-minute neighborhood so economical, convenient links to other areas of the city are necessary. Even though bikes and transit are not included in the basic definition of a 15-minute neighborhood, the assembly recognizes the importance of supporting multiple forms of mobility.

Secondary Services Definitions

Community Garden

What counts: community gardens, community plots, school gardens

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Community gardens provide a space to grow food collectively. They produce food that meets people's needs, and food can also be shared. They are a place for kids of all ages to be engaged in work.

Library

What counts: public libraries, university library

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Libraries provide books. But they are also public services buildings. They host groups like knitting clubs and book clubs; they support a range of hobbies and interests through tool libraries and makerspaces. They are a house of culture, a place to learn about dance, arts, and crafts. Libraries don't require users spending money. They are a gathering place.

Medical Services

What counts: urgent care, community clinics, primary care, specialists, Chinese medicine, holistic health clinics, Planned Parenthood, pharmacies, retail that sells medical supplies (e.g., Target)

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? These services can be particularly important as places to get immediate help, especially during unexpected situations where being close-by makes it easier and faster to get basic medical attention.

Note: Many groups acknowledged that some medical needs are not met within a neighborhood, especially when insurance, specialists, referrals, and established relationships are involved. Major emergencies are likely to use an ambulance to transfer to a full hospital. These medical services meet needs in between specialized care and emergencies.

Public Art Spaces and Interactive Art

What is included: temporary and permanent interactive art, theaters, performing arts centers, sculpture gardens, galleries, art schools

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Art provides the opportunity for creative expression as well as something to identify with. Public art, especially, can give character



and identity to the neighborhood. Public art provides a site of interaction and a space for kids of all ages to meet together. Some art spaces also allow people to create their own art with other people.

Recreation Center

What counts: named recreation centers, YMCA, gyms, community pools. Unlike parks, recreation centers seem to be buildings of some sort not primarily outside.

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Recreation centers provide places to exercise, but they frequently provide much more. They host community events, provide a gathering place. Many recreation centers have multi-purposes spaces that can be used for other purposes. Recreation centers also can provide childcare.

Restaurants

What counts: restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, bakeries, bars

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Part of food security. Restaurants provide a place to celebrate and a way to meet needs after an exhausting day. Restaurants are community gathering spots. They also provide employment for the neighborhood. Within 15-minute neighborhoods, restaurants can provide something familiar and comforting, a place to be a regular. Restaurants do not need to be expensive or fancy.

Retail

What counts: retail includes both retail centers with multiple shops, individual stores, places for small retail businesses

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? Retail provides opportunities to buy things. Since this category is broad, folks often didn't detail what they were buying as much as appreciation for being able to get things they need, whether it be office supplies or garden supplies or more.

Schools

What counts: elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, universities

Why is it an important service for 15-minute neighborhood? People expressed a school being foundational to a neighborhood. If people go to school together, they grow up in the community together. Schools also provide a place for people to meet people and gather together. Since Boulder has school choice, the assembly recognized that some folks would decide to attend a school further away to meet their kids' educational needs.



Section 6: Principles for Selecting Where to Enable 15-Minute Neighborhoods in Boulder Valley

The mandate charged the assembly with identifying where to facilitate 15-minute neighborhoods within Boulder Valley. The assembly identified four principles for determining where to enable 15-minute neighborhoods. These principles are intended to **work together** to determine where to foster a 15-minute neighborhood. The first two principles are complementary ways to select where based on existing housing types within an area; the third principle centers equity, and the fourth principle balances efficiency and expanding services by selecting areas that have a moderate number of services and amenities within the definition of a 15-minute neighborhood.

Principle 1: Selecting neighborhoods where there is space available (through large parking lots, lots for sale, industrial lots) to build the needed housing types to create a 15-minute neighborhood.⁷

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This principle centers the importance of mixed density within the assembly's definition of a 15-minute neighborhood and looks for areas with underutilized land to build housing types currently missing to create a 15-minute neighborhood with mixed density. This approach enables 15-minute neighborhoods in new areas (that don't already have mixed density) where it is also realistic because there is space available to build what is needed and/or landowners are open to developing in ways to work toward mixed density. The tradeoff here is that there is not a lot of land available in Boulder; relying on space available often means losing existing businesses or industry in "underutilized" spaces.

Principle 2: Areas that already have mixed density.

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This principle centers the importance of mixed density within the assembly's definition of a 15-minute neighborhood, recognizing that developing new housing types can be a long, difficult process. Therefore, this principle starts in places that already have a mix of low, medium, and high-density housing and business activity within the same area.

⁷ There were 43 members of the assembly. Some assembly members abstained from voting on select items so the vote totals may vary.



Principle 3: Prioritize areas with high or intermediate high priority areas with the city's equity index.

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This principle advances the assembly's value of equity by prioritizing areas that are high priority areas based on racial and ethnic diversity as well as economic needs. The assembly recognized that the city's equity index uses census blocks, which may require interpretation and translation to work at the level of the neighborhood.

Since the goal of this principle is to prioritize equity, attention should be paid to equitable outcomes of creating 15-minute neighborhoods. This includes the potential of displacing existing residents and businesses as well as gentrification that pushes people out of the neighborhood over time, both of which would counter the intention of prioritizing high priority areas from the city's equity index.

Principle 4: A moderate number of services/amenities currently.

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This is a place where some services and amenities within the definition are in place and some things would need to be added. It represents a balance between the efficiency of being able to more easily become a 15-minute neighborhood and the desire to support amenities in places that do not currently have them.

This principle reinforces that the assembly does not prioritize facilitating 15-minute neighborhoods in the areas that are *already* closest to being 15-minute neighborhoods. Do not just pursue the "lowest hanging fruit."



Section 7: Recommendations

15-minute neighborhoods was selected as the topic for the community assembly because there was not much progress in the ten years during which it had been part of the Comprehensive Plan. There was a perception among city and county planners that 15-minute neighborhoods had the potential to advance multiple focus areas from the Comprehensive Plan update. This potential also posed a practical problem for the assembly—15-minute neighborhoods are complicated! There was not enough time to learn about and fully consider how 15-minute neighborhoods might advance all seven focus areas in the Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, the assembly considered all seven focus areas and then selected two to engage in more depth: Housing Choice & Opportunity and Inclusive Local Economy.

A focus area did not mean that the assembly was responsible for solving this problem. **Instead, the charge was to consider how to do 15-minute neighborhoods in a way that addressed their focus areas.** This assembly was instructed to consider whether 15-minute neighborhoods would positively or negatively affect a focus area.

The assembly recommends fifteen ways to implement 15-minute neighborhoods (in addition to the definition and principles for choosing where). Of these, three recommendations focus on housing choice and opportunity, six recommendations focus on inclusive local economy, and six are general recommendations. These recommendations reflect the assembly's values of equity and inclusion by offering specific ways to make Boulder's inclusive, diverse, connected 15-minute neighborhoods possible.

The assembly recognizes that some of these recommendations fit within the Comprehensive Plan while some recommendations connect to other city and county policies. In general, the assembly sought to reduce barriers to 15-minute neighborhoods by simplifying already complex systems or increasing flexibility needed to create 15-minute neighborhoods. Nonetheless, some of the recommendations call for increased oversight and additional research in recognition of areas where Boulder may lack knowledge or compliance essential for 15-minute neighborhoods (e.g., accessibility). The assembly hopes these recommendations may be paired with organizations and staff that are already doing this work wherever possible rather than unduly introducing more complexity.

Housing Choice & Opportunity

- 15-minute neighborhoods should be mixed density communities; each neighborhood should include high, medium, and low-density areas.

15-minute neighborhoods are places that benefit from the interactions between people and businesses that stem from having a range of densities near each other. The assembly



is directly challenging the assumption that 15-minute neighborhoods are only high density. Instead, 15-minute neighborhoods include a range of housing types and businesses within close proximity to each other.⁸

- 15-minute neighborhoods should be mixed income. Like mixed density, 15-minute neighborhoods should include low, middle, and high-income housing. Boulder already has high-income housing; low and middle-income housing should be supported through city and county programs to facilitate and subsidize building.⁹

36

5

Boulder real estate is very expensive. Without support, this means that low and middle-income residents will be pushed out. This recommendation sees these residents as vital to 15-minute neighborhoods. To enable mixed income neighborhoods, the city and county should continue to support building low and middle-income housing through multiple programs.

- Support building intergenerational, extended family housing, or co-living units through city and county programs that help facilitate and subsidize building.

33

6

Intergenerational housing enables multiple generations to live together through “home within a home” set-ups and/or connected units. Intergenerational housing may be particularly welcoming for cultural groups where extended families live together. These housing set-ups are not restricted to nuclear families. They may also be of interest for supporting folks who benefit from living arrangements that provide care, support, and independence, such as aging residents or disabled adults. Within a college town, this housing may also appeal to undergraduate and graduate students living with other people or families. Support for building this housing may also come through changes in zoning to allow this type of housing in more areas.

⁸ This recommendation is also included in the definition because it describes the housing types within 15-minute neighborhoods.

⁹ There were 43 members of the assembly. Some assembly members abstained from voting on select items so the vote totals may vary.



Inclusive Local Economy

- Boulder has people who want to create businesses and struggle to find spaces, and there are currently vacant commercial spaces. The city should pilot a range of creative ways to address this problem.

42

This recommendation recognizes a problem in Boulder: people who want to start businesses often struggle to find spaces that are affordable and fit their business needs. This may include smaller spaces for starting new businesses. Given vacant commercial spaces, this lack of affordable business spaces does not seem inevitable. This recommendation calls for the city to pilot approaches to addressing this problem, which may include reducing regulations or providing incentives to sub-divide existing spaces.

- Support in-home businesses within 15-minute neighborhoods by reducing the regulations and barriers to starting them. This may include changing property codes to allow businesses in residential areas.

39

4

This recommendation recognizes that 15-minute neighborhoods call for micro-businesses in new areas. Reducing regulations and barriers to operating in-home businesses is a way to support economic expansion.

- Create neighborhood-level economy support navigator programs with community involvement to advise about how to open and operate a business in the neighborhood, including navigating city codes and requirements.

39

4



This recommendation creates support for people who want to start businesses. It recognizes that Boulder’s regulations and codes are often complex. A navigator program would help reduce these barriers. By locating a navigator program within a 15-minute neighborhood and involving neighbors, the hope is that a navigator program shares local knowledge about what it means to operate a neighborhood business and cultivates interactions between business owners and community members that contribute to a connected community.

- Develop economic development structures and programs within 15-minute neighborhoods.

38 3

This recommendation recognizes that the city is initiating new economic development programs. This recommendation suggests that these activities should include programs specifically within 15-minute neighborhoods. For example, instead of just creating a downtown development authority the city would pursue similar entities within 15-minute neighborhoods.

- Support food trucks by reducing barriers to them, including considering what zones food trucks can be allowed in within 15-minute neighborhoods.

34 9

This recommendation recognizes that current regulations often keep food trucks out of neighborhood areas whereas 15-minute neighborhoods call for rethinking the expectations that residential areas are protected from business activity. Food trucks are important micro businesses that are often less expensive to start than other types of restaurants so they are more accessible. In turn, food trucks often provide more accessibly priced food while also giving the neighborhood the benefits of a restaurant (as discussed in the services & amenities section).

- 
- Neighborhoods should develop their own programs to enable neighbors to support multiple local businesses around them.

22

19

This recommendation to prospective 15-minute neighborhoods encourages the development of incentive programs that support local businesses. For example, neighbors may be able to purchase neighborhood bucks that can only be spent at participating neighborhood businesses. Small subsidies may increase the purchasing power if neighbors could pay \$80 for \$100 neighborhood bucks that all go to neighborhood businesses.

Because the two focus areas are very complicated, the assembly spent considerable time learning and deliberating about them. But the assembly was not restricted to only thinking about the focus areas. The assembly has several additional recommendations for how to implement 15-minute neighborhoods that address the assembly's concerns about accessibility and supporting the changes necessary for the creation of thriving 15-minute neighborhoods.

- Reduce barriers to neighborhood organized parties and festivals to enable more neighborhood events that foster interaction and support neighborhood micro businesses.

42 1

This recommendation recognizes the importance of neighborhood gatherings for building community and economic opportunities. This could come in the form of built infrastructure that enables gathering as well as facilitating the permits and fees or shutting down streets.

- 15-minute neighborhoods should have city support for ongoing snow removal and yard overgrowth so that sidewalks, crosswalks, and streets are safe and accessible for everyone across all seasons. This includes **enforcing current policy** and creating ongoing maintenance of areas like curb cuts that tend to get icy and built up with snow during and after storms.

40 1



Assembly members note that this recommendation **does not** need to be restricted to 15-minute neighborhoods. This would improve the accessibility of neighborhood infrastructure across Boulder. This recommendation comes from realizing that the current neighborhood infrastructure is not maintained in ways that allow year-round accessibility, especially for people using wheelchairs or strollers. A 15-minute neighborhood relies on year-round accessibility for pedestrians of all abilities.

- Conduct accessibility audits within 15-minute neighborhoods as part of implementation to identify infrastructure that is inaccessible and develop specific plans to reduce barriers. These audits can include moving through neighborhoods on paths as well as accessing essential services.

38 2

This recommendation draws attention to identifying specific barriers to accessing services and pathways within 15-minute neighborhoods so that these barriers can be reduced. Audits are key to ongoing attention to these barriers and putting together plans that address them in an ongoing way.

- The city and county should study how other cities have successfully managed change while implementing 15-minute neighborhoods, and apply relevant insights locally.

37 4

“Change management” attends to all of the ways that cities have implemented 15-minute neighborhoods to learn from what they have done, the problems they have encountered, and the lessons they have learned. This recommendation pushes Boulder to continue to learn from other places that are also creating 15-minute neighborhoods in new areas. This recommendation anticipates challenges implementing 15-minute neighborhoods and seeks to integrate learning from other places doing this work.

- Facilitate public events that attempt to foster connections between neighborhood areas and promote awareness of 15-minute neighborhoods.

36 5



This recommendation recognizes that thriving 15-minute neighborhoods need to be cultivated. One way to do this is to facilitate events that bring people together and help people recognize the opportunities that come with 15-minute neighborhoods. This can include providing grants or streamlining event planning.

- Actively promote ways to learn about 15-minute neighborhoods and how they can be developed to meet the long-term vision of specific neighborhoods.

35

8

This recommendation recognizes that many people in Boulder are not aware of 15-minute neighborhoods despite it being part of the Comprehensive Plan for ten years. This recommendation supports learning about 15-minute neighborhoods so that people can imagine how their neighborhood might become a 15-minute neighborhood. This public education may also spark organic development by people already living and working in an area.

Section 8: Challenges & Opportunities

Over the course of seven meetings, the assembly discussed many challenges and opportunities of creating 15-minute neighborhoods in Boulder Valley. Here, we highlight key challenges and opportunities the assembly believes that city and county decision-makers should consider over the next twenty years as they facilitate 15-minute neighborhoods as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Challenges

- Fully creating 15-minute neighborhoods that have all of the benefits we seek cannot be accomplished through policy or city and county-led actions alone. 15-minute neighborhoods will also require organic changes by individuals, developers, and neighborhoods. ¹⁰

41

- Boulder has a history of making visionary changes around land use. Unlike big landmark decisions like creating the Blue Line or creating a dedicated sales tax to purchase open space lands, 15-minute neighborhoods are a vision that requires many ongoing changes, some of which will necessarily vary by neighborhood. Creating 15-minute neighborhoods requires multiple, ongoing decisions that may each face opposition.

39 1

- Historically, the city has left businesses to make it on their own. This has resulted in an economy dominated by companies and businesses that have the capital to start and sustain businesses in Boulder. We currently have a local economy full of exclusion without many structures to reduce the substantial barriers (cost, complex city codes) to starting a business in Boulder.

39 4

- Despite efforts and incentive programs, housing in Boulder is unaffordable for many who want to live here. The consequences of this shape our community in profound ways.

36 5

¹⁰ This recommendation is also included in the definition because it describes the housing types within 15-minute neighborhoods. There were 43 members of the assembly. Some assembly members abstained from voting on select items so the vote totals may vary.

- Boulder has made principled decisions, often on behalf of preserving the natural environment, that have reduced space available for housing and created regulations to restrict how housing can be built. The cumulative effects of these decisions has simultaneously made Boulder a good place to live while constraining action on other values. This trade-off between the environment and housing is not inevitable, but we should recognize this history.



- Vibrant 15-minute neighborhoods have the potential to invite gentrification that undermines the city and county's equity goals.



- Many folks in Boulder do not live close to where they work. A significant number of people commute into Boulder for work while living elsewhere. The Boulder housing market makes it difficult to move if you change jobs. 15-minute neighborhoods will have a limited impact on this problem. In other places, 15-minute neighborhoods may include work; in Boulder, work is not included.



Minority Report

We believe in the importance that people should be able to live close to where they work. This closely aligns with the values of equity and inclusion, and the goals of creating 15-minute neighborhoods in Boulder. Two reasons support this:

First, not including work creates more motor vehicle traffic and congestion through long distance commuting. We agree with the challenge that Boulder has many large corporate and research companies located within it, not to mention CU, generating a lot of commuter traffic. Creating neighborhoods where people live and work can reduce the need to commute. **Second**, being able to work close to where you live has important economic impacts. Local employees support neighborhoods by keeping their economic impact close to home. Low-income jobs are an inherent part of every local economy.

These employees should be able to live close-by and should not be burdened with long commutes and the expenses associated with that. These employees staff our restaurants, grocery stores and retail businesses, they will be keeping the city moving through construction, snow plowing and maintaining green spaces. If Boulder was to push these people further away from the city, it would lose the essential service workers that make these neighborhoods possible.

In sum, if you cannot afford to live in the neighborhood where you work, it is not a 15-minute neighborhood because you are using a car and going much further than 15 minutes on a daily basis.

Opportunities

- 15-minute neighborhoods can intentionally create connections and community by developing services and amenities that create interactions across the neighborhood, including parks, schools, and community centers.

39 3

- 15-minute neighborhoods need neighborhood-serving businesses. If done well, 15-minute neighborhoods can support a range of small neighborhood-serving businesses that create a more inclusive local economy by fostering connections between neighbors and the businesses close to them.

38 3

- 15-minute neighborhoods provide the opportunity to develop livable and desirable neighborhoods that are places to live because they provide access to what people need without relying on motorized vehicles.

35 6

- 15-minute neighborhoods provide opportunities to increase density in ways that foster community connections and make Boulder a better place to live for a wider range of folks.

35 7

- 15-minute neighborhoods are a new vision of where we want society to go on a level that we can actually imagine—the neighborhood. They provide a way to focus on hyper-local development and investment across housing, business, and transportation.

34 6

- 15-minute neighborhoods can be a meaningful part of responding to bigger problems, such as climate change.

33 9

Assembly Meeting Descriptions

Meeting 1: May 3, 2025

The Community Assembly convened for the first time. After greetings from city and county officials, the assembly members determined agreements for working together as a group and began discussing the values that should guide their work together. They also heard three presentations about land use planning and 15-minute neighborhoods:

- What is Land Use Planning? by Brad Mueller, Director of Planning and Development Services, City of Boulder
- Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan Overview by Kristofer Johnson, Comprehensive Planning Manager, City of Boulder
- Introduction to 15-minute Neighborhoods by Jennifer Steffel-Johnson, PhD, University of Colorado, Denver



Meeting 2: May 31, 2025

This meeting started with the assembly working with the values they identified during the first session. In small groups, they defined these values and then shared the definitions with the full assembly to refine them. In these full assembly discussions, equity was weaved into the definitions of multiple values. The assembly indicated that equity may be their organizing value, which they discussed more at the following meeting.

The learning goal for this meeting was to understand the possibilities for 15-minute neighborhoods by hearing from and about other cities that had implemented them. The assembly received presentations from city staff and from planners in other communities:

- Portland's 20-minute Neighborhoods by Bill Cunningham, Senior City Planner, Portland, OR
- Plan Melbourne and 20-minute Neighborhoods, Jo O'Byrne, Strategic Urban Planner, Melbourne, Australia
- 15-minute City Examples by Tess Schorn, City Planner, City of Boulder

There was a perception among city and county planners that 15-minute neighborhoods had the potential to advance multiple Comprehensive Plan focus areas—this is part of why this topic was selected for the assembly. However, this potential also posed a practical problem for the assembly—15-minute neighborhoods are complicated! There was not enough time to learn about and fully consider how 15-minute neighborhoods might advance **all** of the focus areas. The assembly heard a presentation about the focus areas in the Comprehensive Plan:

- 15-minute Neighborhoods and the Comprehensive Plan by Christopher Ranglos, City of Boulder

Then the assembly considered all seven focus areas before selecting two to engage in more depth as an assembly: Housing Choice & Opportunity and Inclusive Local Economy.

Meeting 3: Aug. 23, 2025



The Community Assembly reconvened after a summer break. After a recap of the previous learning and discussions, they revisited their group values to clarify their organizing value: equity.

This session focused on learning more about the focus areas the assembly had selected: Housing Choice and Opportunity, and Inclusive Local Economy. Assembly members heard a series of live interviews designed around the information needs and questions that assembly members expressed at the previous session. The assembly heard from:

- Ja'Mal Gilmore, small business owner sharing about his experiences working to start and sustain a business in Boulder
- Mark Woulf, Boulder Assistant City Manager sharing about city policies and programs related to economic development and vitality
- Danica Powell of Trestle Strategies Group and Lyndon Valicenti of Daylight sharing information and perspectives about attainable housing in Boulder
- Taped interviews of residents of the Ponderosa manufactured home community sharing about the impacts of change in their neighborhood

Assembly members drew on these interviews and their sense of the challenges and opportunities for 15-minute neighborhoods to develop ideas about how 15-minute neighborhoods could contribute to addressing both focus areas. This session generated ideas for recommendations, challenges, and opportunities that the assembly deliberated about in later sessions.

Meeting 4: Sept. 6, 2025



The Community Assembly came together for a field trip in the morning and deliberation in the afternoon. The Field Trip included a bus tour through North Boulder and a walking tour of Boulder Junction. These experiences included hearing from:

- Karl Guiler, City of Boulder Planning Policy Advisor, provided a bus tour of North Boulder to talk about diverse types of housing
- Scott Holton of Elements Properties shared about his experience as a developer in Boulder Junction

Assembly members had a choice of a self-guided walking tour of Boulder Junction, or accompanying one of three staff tour guides:

- Karl Guiler focused on policy and zoning
- Brad Mueller, Planning and Development Services Director, focused on transit-oriented development
- Vivian Castro-Wooldridge, Planning Engagement Strategist, focused on community feedback gathered during the Boulder Junction Phase 2 planning process

At the community room of Boulder Housing Partner's 30PRL Bluebell building the full group met with Jenn Ochs, a resident of the property, and Wayde Jester, owner of Zeal Food.

The afternoon sessions drew on the field trip experiences as well as lived experiences in Boulder to playfully imagine what assembly members might want 15-minute neighborhoods to look and feel like. They started by building 15-minute neighborhoods in small groups out of found materials, pipe cleaners, legos, and more. After building out neighborhoods and talking about why different elements were important to assembly members, the assembly subjected their imagined neighborhoods to a series of stress tests. Each of these stress tests was developed around the assembly's values to ensure that they were considering whether and how the neighborhoods they imagined would reflect the assembly's values. The groups had a chance to rebuild after these stress tests. The process culminated in collectively identifying a list of services and amenities for 15-minute neighborhoods.



Meeting 5: Sept. 20, 2025

The Community Assembly gathered for a day focused on deliberation about the definition of 15-minute neighborhoods and their recommendations. Their conversation was informed by a visit from the Center for People with Disabilities, responding to questions generated in their discussions about their 15-minute neighborhoods. Assembly members had different understandings about the accessibility of public transit, which made it clear they needed to hear directly from folks who navigate Boulder with wheelchairs and canes. The assembly heard from:

- Craig Towler, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
- Michael Stone, Board member



The afternoon focused on deliberation about different approaches to how 15-minute neighborhoods could address the two selected focus areas. The assembly completed a straw poll vote after these deliberations to see the items that had support from the assembly and would continue to be part of future meetings.

Meeting 6: Oct. 4, 2025

The Community Assembly had a full day of deliberation. The morning was spent prioritizing essential and secondary services and amenities and developing principles for where a 15-minute neighborhood should be located. To answer questions generated during this deliberation, the assembly had a chance to ask questions from:

- Kathleen King, Principal City Planner, City of Boulder

The afternoon focused on refining the definition and deliberating about recommendations, challenges, and opportunities beyond the two focus areas.

Meeting 7: Oct. 18, 2025

Assembly members had a final round of deliberation that revised their recommendations based on concerns from assembly members. The assembly held a final vote on all of the assembly's recommendations: the definition, principles for selecting where, recommendations for implementation, challenges, and opportunities. The results of this final vote are embedded in this report, showing the final level of support for each item.

This voting included the opportunity to express interest in writing a minority report—explaining the principled reasons why someone disagreed with a particular item the assembly recommended. When an item has three people interested in a minority report, it appears in the report immediately after the item it is responding to.



Members reflected on the process to help identify lessons learned from this assembly. They also presented the group's key recommendations to city and county leadership and celebrated the process together.

Assembly Project Teams

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The report includes items as written by the Community Assembly during their meetings.

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