

City of Boulder

# ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Proposal to Boulder City Council  
Nov. 21, 2017



# WHY

The City of Boulder recognizes that good public processes and engagement play important roles in making local government both effective and responsive to the community it serves. In previous years, the city has assigned individuals within specific departments to planning and facilitating engagement opportunities with the community. Most public processes in Boulder have been designed around specific policy decisions or program development. There have been numerous successes, as well as efforts that have not met the expectations of the community and the decision-makers relying upon its input.

In January 2016, Boulder City Council recognized improvements were needed in how the city engages, informs and includes the public. Council directed staff to involve the community in developing recommendations to enhance engagement. This led to the creation of a 14-member Public Participation Working Group, which was supported by one council member and two city employees. The group met more than 30 times over 18 months. This working group presented a comprehensive report to City Council in August 2017. This can be found at [www.bouldercolorado.gov/city-council/public-participation-working-group](http://www.bouldercolorado.gov/city-council/public-participation-working-group).

The report identified what the group called problem statements, defined five core principles of 'best in class' engagement and made a series of recommendations for improvement. While the report provided additional details and strategic counsel, the group landed on two over-arching recommendations: change the culture of public engagement and utilize a comprehensive decision-making process.

## What is engagement?

An active, expansive relationship between the city and the community that includes any level of public participation; this typically encourages two-way dialogue.

## What is public participation?

Public participation is a type of engagement that usually occurs in decision-making processes. It can define minimum standards, such as public hearings, comment periods and open records. It also can indicate a range of public involvement approaches from informing to partnering and collaboration.

## FRAMEWORK GUIDE:

- p. 2 ..... **Section 1: WHY**  
Explains the purpose of this framework and the city's engagement mission
- p. 4 ..... **Section 2: HOW**  
Outlines the strategic objectives and the timeline of the activities to meet those objectives
- p. 8 ..... **Section 3: WHAT**  
Describes engagement methods and best practices to follow when pursuing engagement efforts
- p. 12 ..... **Section 4: WHO**  
Lists the city employees and groups who will collaborate to enhance engagement efforts
- p. 14 ..... **Section 5: RESULTS**  
Demonstrates the process the city will follow to measure progress



# IDENTIFYING WHAT GOOD ENGAGEMENT IS

City Council supported the working group's findings and provided some additional input at a study session on Aug. 28, 2017. Based on this, city staff developed a plan to implement the recommendations and introduce a more comprehensive, consistent and strategic approach to civic engagement in Boulder.

The result is this Engagement Strategic Framework. This document incorporates valuable contributions and specific recommendations made by the working group. It also draws upon the experiences and expertise of staff and best practices that are supported by an organization recognized globally for its commitment to meaningful engagement. That organization is the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

This framework is intended to guide staff's work, help to clarify the city's intentions and systems so residents and other impacted individuals know what to expect, and support other organizations working to cultivate good engagement and/or public participation.

It starts here – with this “why” statement: The City of Boulder is working to improve its engagement culture and processes because it recognizes that local government makes better decisions and creates more responsive programs and services when the community it serves has a meaningful voice. The best engagement is appropriately scaled, consistent and reliable, inclusive and respectful of all participants.



This framework represents the City of Boulder's commitment to building on the lessons of its past by creating engagement opportunities that support high performance and the industry's gold standard, while also encouraging the innovation and creativity that are hallmarks of our community.

# CORE PRINCIPLES & VALUES

The problem is clearly defined.

Public engagement is thoughtfully planned.

All voices are encouraged and included.

Public contribution and civil participation are fostered.

The process is trustworthy and transparent.



# HOW



# WE ARE STRATEGIC

The Public Participation Working Group made two core recommendations: change the culture of engagement in Boulder and implement/utilize a clear decision-making process. While the group provided some suggestions for action items that support these recommendations, it also recognized the importance of the city organization taking ownership of a path forward.

This framework is designed to achieve the following objective: To sustain a culture and practice of meaningful civic engagement in the City of Boulder to achieve outcomes that reflect our community's concerns, aspirations and shared values.

Six strategies were identified to support this. These will serve as important touchstones for evaluating possible work plan items and progress.



# *Boulder's Engagement Strategic Framework*

## SIX STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

To adopt and sustain a culture and practice of meaningful civic engagement in the City of Boulder to achieve outcomes that reflect our community's concerns, aspirations and shared values.



### LEARN TOGETHER

---

Build skills and a shared understanding of core principles, practices and processes associated with high-quality community engagement.



### HELP PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

---

Implement consistent processes to support the creation and use of effective and appropriately-scaled engagement plans. Communicate clearly about opportunities for timely and meaningful public input and engagement. Follow set meeting schedules as much as possible. Define roles.



### CULTIVATE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

---

Enhance existing relationships with those affected by city decisions and programs through positive and constructive dialogue. Pilot new approaches to invite and encourage all impacted individuals and groups to participate in ways that are welcoming and comfortable to them.



### BE TRANSPARENT

---

Develop and implement techniques that increase transparency into decision-making and democratic processes. Help everyone understand constraints and the variety of perspectives on any given issue and explain how the feedback received during a process shaped the outcome.



### USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

---

Assess our current and existing engagement tools and techniques and choose those that most effectively allow us to reach desired audiences. Recognize the value of a mix of digital platforms, printed materials and in-person methods.



### EVALUATE AND EVOLVE

---

Demonstrate a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement through honest evaluation of clearly defined metrics as well as ongoing creativity in the pursuit of new ideas. Make Boulder an international model of meaningful participation.



# WHAT

## IAP2 PRINCIPLES & BEST PRACTICES SERVE AS A GUIDE

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) was founded in 1990 and emphasizes the importance of identifying clear goals and designing programs that support effective and meaningful public participation. IAP2 views public participation as any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make decisions. Public participation includes all aspects of identifying problems and opportunities, developing alternatives and making decisions. It uses tools and techniques that are common to a number of dispute resolution and communications fields. IAP2 lays out practical guidance and adaptable materials to support organizations that are committed to best practices methodology and learning.

One of the hallmark offerings of IAP2 is a tried and tested five-step process for creating strategic engagement plans. These steps build consistency and compel the process designer to develop a practice of 1) gaining internal commitment, 2) assessing impacted individuals and groups and their corresponding perceptions, 3) selecting an appropriate level(s) of engagement, 4) defining the decision-making process and engagement objective(s), and 5) designing an engagement plan. In 2016, a core group of about 25 city staff members received IAP2 Planning and Techniques training. Several departments have begun to implement components of this system and have already experienced successful relationship-building outcomes.

"I am excited to build on the city's history of engagement and public participation with new ideas and strategies.

There's a lot to be achieved by helping those of us on staff and community members know what our standards are and what they can expect."

— Brenda Ritenour,  
Boulder's neighborhood liaison



## Putting IAP2 Into Practice

As an example, staff overseeing the Prairie Dog Working Group process in 2016 and 2017 began implementing many of the IAP2 steps as part of its efforts. As an outcome of this application, a clear and credible process is being followed, and relationships between stakeholders and staff remain respectful and productive. The staff team preparing for the 2018 Open Space and Mountain Parks Master Plan update is also working hard to develop its engagement plan around these best practices, making it much easier for community members to see when key points of engagement will occur.

There is solid alignment between the Core Principles outlined on page 3 of this framework and IAP2's Code of Ethics and Core Values. Additionally, IAP2 provides an established set of practices that other governments, some in our region as well as others around the world, are leveraging. This means Boulder can readily access trainers, facilitators and a network of skilled practitioners. Our community can both learn from — and contribute to — this body of work.



## BOULDER'S ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

The city will follow a modified version of IAP2's engagement spectrum to help identify the role of the community in project planning and decision-making processes.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE
<b>PARTICIPATION GOAL</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding a problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on public analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout a process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of a preferred solution.
<b>PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns and aspirations, and share feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are reflected in any alternatives and share feedback on how the public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and to incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

ADAPTED FROM ©IAP2 INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION 2014.



# USING A DEFINED NINE-STEP PROCESS

Developed by the Public Participation Working Group and supported by city staff, the city will implement a nine-step decision-making process that is structured to be comprehensive, scalable and easy to follow for both city staff and community members. Staff will enact and follow these steps for identified projects, solidifying consistency in engagement across the city. This structure will give community members the ability to participate in decision-making processes in a more informed and predictable way, and in closer partnership with city staff and decision-makers.



# NEAR-TERM ACTION ITEMS

As is standard practice, the city will create annual work plans that prioritize tasks and techniques to support the six engagement strategies defined in this framework. The following pages offer a sneak peak at a few key near-term action items that are anticipated within the first 36 months of implementation.

## LEARN TOGETHER

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

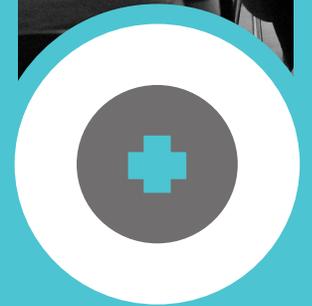
- Create base materials to explain IAP2 principles, spectrum and new city processes
- Survey and choose five to six pilots to test the nine-step engagement wheel
- Develop a civic education program
- Understand engagement best practices for high-conflict issues

### 2018

- Create and share full toolkit of handouts, templates and cheat sheets
- Launch pilot projects
- Implement civic education program
- Train leadership team and council members
- Train Engagement Coordination Committee

### 2019

- Assess and address areas of additional learning and innovation



## HELP PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

- Create and present framework to council for feedback
- Define roles and write charter for Engagement Coordination Committee

### 2018

- Digital depiction of decision-making timelines and engagement opportunities
- Re-evaluate role of boards and commissions in engagement and plan appropriate training to support this
- Educate community members about city's new approach, the levels of engagement and the promise that accompanies each

### 2019

- Create an empirical resource estimate tool

## CULTIVATE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

- Start community conversation about civil discourse guidelines
- Gather follow-up feedback from recent Perceptions Assessment on Boulder as an inclusive and welcoming community

### 2018

- Develop and ratify civil discourse guidelines
- Study and begin to develop more culturally sensitive engagement processes
- Explore partnerships with ambassadors to underrepresented groups
- In-person town hall concept development and pilots
- Further gaps assessment to identify those who are not participating and why

### 2019

- Quality of life and engagement study for a group not typically involved in city issues

## BE TRANSPARENT

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

- Creation and use of consistent feedback reports, including “if not, why not” explanations

### 2018

- Process improvements to how community members contact council and how this correspondence is shared with the public
- Creation of an online resource that shows how council members vote on specific topics

### 2019

- Explore innovative approaches other cities and organizations are using to increase transparency through video, websites and other communication platforms

## USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

- Assess responses to RFP and select digital engagement platform
- Develop consistent questions that help evaluate process, rather than outcome, satisfaction

### 2018

- Share toolkits and engagement approach online with public
- Implement digital engagement platform, work processes and strategic understanding of best uses
- Explore telephone town hall technology and best practices
- Web refresh/new navigation approach (in partnership with IT and Communication)
- Explore FB Live Q and A sessions with council members and key staff

### 2019

- Assess companion digital engagement tools
- Develop clear project process guidelines for subcommittees
- Establish consistent criteria for working group participation

## EVALUATE & EVOLVE

### 2017 (4TH QUARTER)

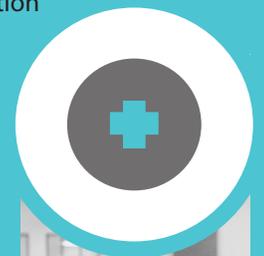
- Establish format for, and culture of, debriefs after engagement efforts
- Define base outputs for pilot projects and other engagement efforts
- Creation of initial metrics for overall engagement program

### 2018

- Creation and use of ongoing surveys to evaluate engagement satisfaction and performance

### 2019

- Re-evaluate strategies and work focus areas based on what has been learned





# WHO

## ENGAGEMENT RESOURCE TEAM

The city has created two dedicated positions — an engagement manager and an engagement specialist — with the responsibility of improving and strengthening the culture of civic engagement. This team's success will require a balance of leadership, increased coordination, thoughtful prioritization, shared learning and collaboration with fellow city employees and with the Boulder community. In collaboration with others, these individuals will support effective engagement by:

Identifying opportunities to include more voices in city processes and developing approaches that make all feel welcome and invited to participate

Promoting innovation in the design of engagement opportunities and tools; ensuring that community members receive feedback about how their input is used

Identifying potential pilot projects; assisting project teams to identify an appropriate level of engagement and related techniques

Creating a vision for success in the short- and longer-term as well as processes that support continual evaluation and learning

Coaching and consulting with departmental project teams as they create and implement effective engagement plans

Creating and maintaining training programs and tool kits to support decision-makers, internal staff and community members

Networking and cultivating positive relationships with other public participation practitioners, key stakeholders and community influencers

Serving as skilled facilitators for select projects – and deepening the bench of trained facilitators across the organization

Expanding the city's engagement commitment beyond a project-specific focus to more general relationship-building and listening





## ENGAGEMENT COORDINATION COMMITTEE

This is an existing committee of approximately 25 members from a cross-section of city departments. These employees share an interest in improving engagement in the organization and community. This committee will continue as a core element of this framework. Under the guidance of the engagement manager, members will allocate five to eight hours a month to tasks that contribute to the city's integrated engagement efforts. Possible areas of contribution include:

Researching best practices and recommending potential new strategies and innovative ideas

Brainstorming process improvements to increase communication and shared learning

Serving as liaisons between the engagement team and their departments

Planning and facilitating integrated and strategic engagement events

Assisting in the creation of effective training programs and toolkit materials

Serving as peer support for other work groups as they develop more meaningful and inclusive engagement plans

Helping to evaluate the program, consistent with agreed upon metrics

*All hands*

*on deck!*

## ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH STAFF IN DEPARTMENTS

Several city departments have designated employees who plan and conduct outreach for specific projects or work groups. These individuals will continue to be responsible for outreach and engagement efforts assigned to them.

Because the individuals in the two centralized positions cannot design, conduct and evaluate every engagement effort the city is planning in any given year, these department partners will coordinate with the engagement resource team to strategize activities, aiming for consistent engagement across the city. Department-level engagement staff members bring a tremendous amount of expertise, often have existing relationships and channels of communication. Furthermore, the budgets for their outreach and engagement work come from their departments, so they should be making the decisions about how these resources are spent.

## NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY LIAISONS

The city employs two liaisons — one who works with residents and neighborhoods and another who works with the University of Colorado as well as other local institutions and groups — to identify potential partnerships, maintain positive relationships and resolve issues. Another employee is working with city departments to enhance the experiences of volunteers who engage with local government by donating their skills and time.

These work areas support engagement in its broadest sense and are designed to have a positive impact on city and community interactions of all kinds. Each of these employees also have some work plan items that specifically support this framework's six strategy areas.



# RESULTS

## MEASURING THE CITY'S PROGRESS

To ensure that the strategies are making a positive difference and the city's efforts are having a meaningful impact, staff has identified a set of measurable and informational indicators for the first year of implementation. The following desired outcomes will be evaluated based on the methods outlined below.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	SUCCESS OUTCOMES	HOW OUTCOMES WILL BE MEASURED
Learn together	The city achieves a high level of staff, decision-maker and community clarity around engagement levels/promise to the public.	End of class surveys for all students
Help people know what to expect	The city communicates clearly with the community about levels and processes of engagement, resulting in increased understanding and satisfaction by those who choose to participate.	Survey of community members with a consistent set of process-related questions
Cultivate respectful relationships	The city has made comprehensive stakeholder assessment part of its routine engagement planning process. It also has gained an increased understanding of its inclusivity gaps and has developed strategies for addressing them.	Development of baseline data through demographic analysis, identification of relationships that need nurturing, barriers, and observations about tone and tenor of participation in correspondence and in meetings
Be transparent	The city consistently demonstrates the connection between feedback/input and criteria and decisions. It improves access to council correspondence and council member voting information, modeling transparency around key decisions.	Survey of community members with a consistent set of transparency questions
Use the right tools	The city offers a more diverse array of easy-to-use options for individuals to learn about processes and programs, give input and see how that input is used. It balances in-person and online engagement opportunities to meet diverse needs.	Online analytics tracking number of visits and bounce rate to site/platform, survey of community members with consistent set of questions about venue choice and design of sessions
Evaluate and evolve	Evaluating effectiveness of work during and after processes has become standard practice in the city, and this information is consistently shared with the public.	Analysis of process improvements, compilation of evaluations and existence of 2019 strategies based on assessment

## FACTORS THAT WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED

Culture change takes time, and the Public Participation Working Group advised the city to be transparent and clear about expectations and any limitations. In keeping with this, staff has identified three proposed indicators that will not be a part of its ongoing evaluation.

### Existence of continued disagreement or dissatisfaction with outcomes, especially for more controversial issues

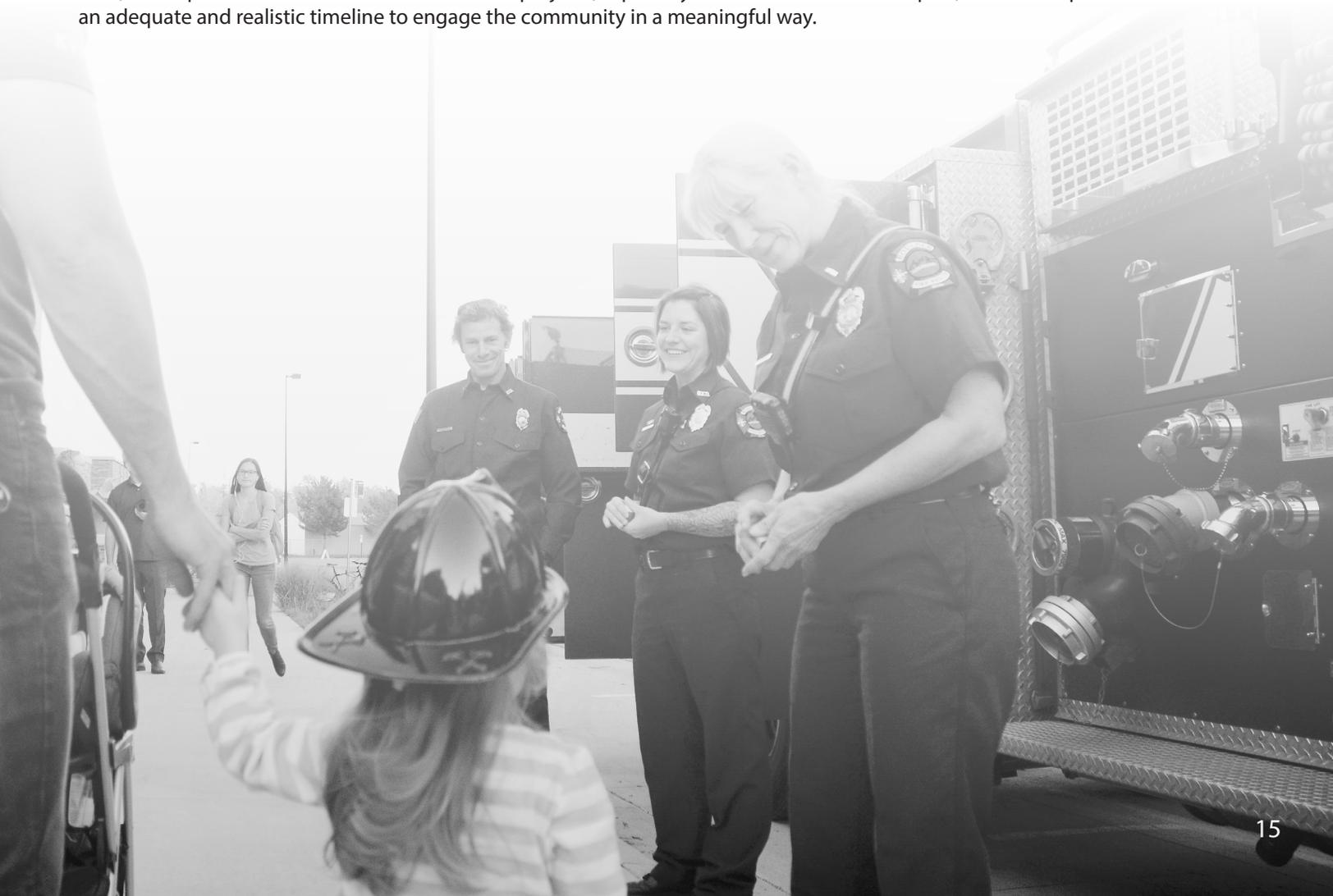
While it is expected that general relations between the city and the Boulder community will improve through this program, there will continue to be a wide variety of viewpoints about specific policy decisions and outcomes in Boulder. This diversity of thought is an important part of any democracy. When the city measures its progress, it will look at levels of process satisfaction rather than outcome satisfaction.

### Amount of engagement or percentage of projects that fall into categories of Involve or Collaborate

The City of Boulder already conducts a high volume of engagement and public processes. This framework is not intended to increase these efforts just to achieve more “points.” In fact, if done in a more coordinated and strategic way, it is likely there could be “less” engagement — but the engagement that occurs will be more targeted and meaningful for decision-makers, staff and community participants. No value will be placed as to where projects fall on the city’s engagement level chart (see page 9). Some projects are appropriate at levels of Inform or Consult, while others require more of an Involve and Collaborate approach, either in their entirety, or during some phases, or with individuals who might be especially impacted. Through strategic planning, the city will endeavor to answer the question: “What is the appropriate level of engagement given the desired objectives?”

### Length of time it takes to complete engagement plan

The city’s decision-making process may appear to have additional steps, leading some to conclude that quality engagement will inherently take more time. This is not necessarily the case, and the length of time for a process will not be considered a “badge of honor.” Instead, the city will utilize early steps in the process, like clearly defining its why statements and including all impacted individuals, so there is clarity throughout the remaining parts of the process. This is expected to lead to efficiencies. At the same time, it is important to understand that for some projects, especially those that are more complex, it will be important to build in an adequate and realistic timeline to engage the community in a meaningful way.





For more information, please contact:  
Sarah Huntley  
Engagement Manager  
City of Boulder  
[huntleys@bouldercolorado.gov](mailto:huntleys@bouldercolorado.gov)  
720-564-2111

