



# City of Boulder Community Dialogue

## Meetings-in-a-Box Summary Capsule Report

### Project Background

#### The Purpose

Boulder's City Council, implementing its Social Sustainability Strategic Plan, initiated the Community Dialogue process to reach all of Boulder's residents, ensuring that the city engages people usually under-represented in traditional civic decision-making. The intent of the initiative was to hear residents' experiences and thoughts about life in Boulder as well as their responses to specific issues and questions facing the city.

#### Random Sample Survey and Meetings-in-a-Box

A community survey was mailed this fall to 3,500 Boulder households, representing a statistically valid random sample of local residents.

To provide depth and richness to the survey, 27 meetings specifically designed to reach identified under-represented populations such as Spanish-language residents, youth, the elderly, young families, and University of Colorado students were held across the community. These meetings were held without the presence of city staff or facilitators and included open-ended questions without presumption of response.

The Meetings occurred between October 2<sup>nd</sup> and November 12<sup>th</sup> and were convened by individuals, groups, and community agencies. In all, 268 people participated in the Meetings-in-a-Box. Of those, 167 were considered members of "general community" groups, 30 were Spanish language residents and people concerned with immigrant issues, and 71 were students from the University of Colorado.

For more information about the Community Dialogue process or for copies of either the survey or Meetings-in-a-Box reports, please contact Jean Gatzaj by calling her at (303) 441-4907 or send her an e-mail at [gatzaj@bouldercolorado.gov](mailto:gatzaj@bouldercolorado.gov).

## Summary of Results

This Capsule Report is a very brief summary of the findings of the Meetings-in-a-Box. There are two documents which provide much more in-depth information about the findings: the first is a Summary Report describing in detail responses to each question; the second is a compilation of every comment from all Meeting-in-a-Box participants.

### General Conclusions

In sum, people who participated in the Meetings-in-a-Box value what is: an outdoor, active lifestyle in a spectacular natural environment that they want to preserve and protect.

At the same time, they worry for what they believe Boulder is becoming: an elitist community intolerant of those who are different and with no room for people of modest or middle class means.

Specifically, several issues emerged:

- Boulder's **natural setting, outdoor lifestyle and the protection of the environment** remain enduring values;
- The **social / political climate** of Boulder is clearly important to its citizens. Some appreciate the activism, the community's creative spirit and its intellectual atmosphere. Others worry that many Boulder residents are excluded from this aspect of life in a community that they perceive to be increasingly unaccepting and elitist;
- Boulder's **transportation system** that enables people to bike, walk and use public transportation easily, providing access to work and to amenities, is an indispensable part of community life;



- Issues of **safety** – for themselves and for their children – are far more important to Spanish language / immigrant interest participants than to any others;

There is no doubt that **diversity of Boulder's population** is a value strongly held by residents who participated in the Meetings-in-a-Box. Many expressed the belief that influences bearing on what they see as a lack of diversity in Boulder include:

- the high and escalating cost of living, particularly the cost of housing;
- the lack of jobs available;
- an unwelcoming environment and lack of acceptance of people of color; and
- an increasingly exclusive and elitist social atmosphere, creating an economically and socially divided community.

## Group Responses

Each Meeting-in-a-Box group was asked to answer three questions by reaching consensus as a group. A re-cap of the group responses follows.

**Question #1: Please list the 4 words or phrases that your group agrees best describe Boulder today**

Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:

- Social climate
- High cost of living



**Question #2: In thinking about Boulder 10 years into the future, please list the 5 things your group agrees you don't want to lose**



Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:

- Transportation
- Community feel
- Quality environment
- Outdoors / open space

**Question #3: In thinking about Boulder 10 years into the future, please list the 5 things your group agrees you would like to change or add**



Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:

- Cost of living
- Social / political climate
- Traffic / transportation

## Individual Responses

Each individual participating in a Meeting-in-a-Box was asked to complete an individual response form. A re-cap of those responses is below.

**Question #1: What do you think are the 3 most important issues facing Boulder today?**

Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:

- Cost of living
- Social / political climate
- Diversity
- Transportation



## Question #2: What 3 things do you value most about life in Boulder?

Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:



- Active / healthy lifestyle
- Beauty / nature
- Education / university
- Economic sustainability

## Question #3: Is there any aspect of life in Boulder that makes it difficult for you to live here?

Frequently mentioned responses by all constituency groups:

- Cost of living
- Social / political climate
- Lack of diversity



## Topics of Importance – Composite Individual Responses

In order to assess the relative importance of topics to individual Meeting-in-a-Box participants, it is important to consider all the responses from all constituency groups to the first three questions on the individual response form.

The 10 most-frequently mentioned topics in priority order were:

1. Cost of living
2. Social / political climate
3. Traffic / transportation
4. Diversity
5. Economic sustainability / jobs
6. Active / healthy lifestyle
7. Beauty / nature
8. Environmental sustainability
9. Open space / parks
10. Growth / land use

## Meeting Evaluations

Participants in the Meetings-in-a-Box evaluated the sessions as follows:

- People found greatest value in the group discussion itself, followed by the fact that they were heard and had an opportunity to hear others;
- Suggestion for improvement included ideas about meeting structure and logistics, but the largest number of responses said no improvement is needed and that theirs was a good meeting; and
- A request for “Other comments?” brought praise from a large number of participants, both urging the city of listen to the results and thanking the city of Boulder for the dialogue.

*The city of Boulder sincerely thanks everyone who participated in the Meetings-in-a-Box !*