

Investing In Community Housing and Human Services Master Plan City of Boulder

May 24, 2005

Latino Focus Group Summary

Background

A Latino focus group was convened on May 24 to obtain input on the City of Boulder's *Draft* Department of Housing and Human Services (HHS) Master Plan. The Plan will serve as a policy guide for the services and funding HHS provides to the community.

In the spring of 2005, staff provided copies (over 300 copies distributed) of the *Draft* HHS Master Plan to the community and made presentations to various community groups. An Open House and Public Forum was held for the general public on March 30 at which Spanish interpretation was made available.

The Latino focus group was facilitated by Clara Perez-Mendez and Nino Gallo, two members of the HHS Master Plan Advisory Committee, a City Manager appointed group of community experts that is advising staff in the development of the Master Plan. Those invited to the focus group were provided a summary of recommendations, translated into Spanish, in advance of the meeting. The meeting was conducted in Spanish with simultaneous English translation provided for non-Spanish speakers. Participants were each provided \$25 grocery store certificates in appreciation for their time and expertise.

Participants were asked to provide input on the following key questions:

1. What can the City do to make it easier for the Latino community to access services?
2. What types of services are needed but not available?
3. What are some ideas the City could use to help the Latino Community feel more a part of Boulder?
4. Other ideas?

Introduction

Participants were welcomed and introductions made. Staff and facilitators thanked participants for coming to share their ideas. A few introductory comments were offered.

- Everyone's opinion is equal. People may have different levels of education or work in variety of jobs, but here in this focus group, everyone has an equal right to participate.
- No question or opinion is right or wrong; we want to hear all opinions and all opinions are important.

- Two methods will be used to solicit input, verbally and in writing. Some people will prefer speaking, others are more comfortable providing written comment. This will provide everyone with a way of their choice to contribute.
- Opinions will be gathered and used by staff to better understand issues and concerns of the Latino community and to incorporate those ideas in planning for the future of the HHS Department.
- People are asked to speak one at a time so that everyone can hear each other.
- There are important issues that affect each of us in different ways. On some issues there may be conflicts and different opinions, but we need to respect differences of opinion.
- We will begin with a brief presentation of the HHS Master Plan and some information about the Latino community in the City of Boulder. Then, the discussion will be focused on the four questions we would like participants to address.

Presentation

The Latino Community in Boulder

According to the 2000 census, over 8% of the population of the city of Boulder is Latino. This represents the largest minority group in the city, and the city is interested in planning for the future. We also know the census figures are probably low and it is likely that the real figure is over 10%. Note that this is just for the city of Boulder; Longmont's Latino population is over 20%.

Of the Latino population in Boulder, about 50% are foreign born and 50% are U.S. born. About 35% reported speaking English either not at all or not well. One thing the City recognizes is the need to provide more information in Spanish.

Of the Boulder residents living below the poverty level, 13% are Latino.

A very dramatic demographic finding is that the majority of Latino immigrants are recent arrivals; two-thirds of the Latino immigrant population have arrived since 1990.

This major demographic trend underscores the importance for the City to plan for the future.

We must remember that there is a great deal of variety among Latinos. While there are some common issues and concerns, there are many differences. Not only do Latinos come from different countries (although most, but not all, Latinos in Colorado have connections with Mexico), but some families have been here for generations, while others have arrived more recently. Some are highly educated, others have not had the opportunity for high levels of education. Some are prosperous, others struggle with the basic necessities of life.

The Housing and Human Services Master Plan

The general vision: Despite the perception of Boulder as an exclusively wealthy, affluent community, many residents struggle with incomes that are insufficient to meet basic needs. An estimated 14% percent of the population of Boulder (excluding University students ages 18 – 22) live below the poverty level, and is slightly higher than the national poverty rate, which is about 12%. High local housing costs and escalating health care costs, combined with low wages, leave many people without sufficient resources to cover essential needs in life, such as food, housing, health care, child care and transportation. These factors place a heavy demand on local human service systems.

The mission of the HHS Department: To meet the housing and human service needs of Boulder residents by providing and supporting services that create a healthy community:

- Support basic needs;
- Protect civil rights;
- Increase affordable housing;
- Strengthen families;
- Foster early child care and education;
- Encourage positive youth behaviors;
- Keep seniors healthy, active and involved;
- Support family members caring for seniors; and
- Encourage social and civic engagement.

The HHS Department provides services and also provides a substantial amount of funding to community agencies that provide services. Two-thirds of the Department's budget is allocated to community agencies. Many in the Latino community have benefited from services provided by or funded through the City's HHS Department.

The City provides services in four areas:

- Senior services;
- Children, youth and families;
- Affordable housing; and
- Community services, which includes the Office of Human Rights (that deals with discrimination issues) and which also includes funding for many community agencies, such as the People's Clinic and Mental Health Center.

As previously described, the demographics of the population are changing. Other important areas requiring planning include: stimulating a healthy, active and involved senior population, supporting family members and others who are caregivers for seniors, assisting families and children, assisting people with disabilities, and motivating more civic and social engagement and involvement with all members of the community.

The focus of this group will be on issues that the City of Boulder can influence. Immigration issues are a crucial concern for many, but that is not something the City influence. Consequently, the discussion here should not emphasize immigrant issues.

Preliminary Comments/Questions

- **Housing:** Many people and families don't have a place to live and cannot afford to live here. Section 8 has closed their waiting list and it can take years for a family to get housing. This is a very difficult reality. Many people who work here are not able to afford to live in Boulder.
- **Health Care:** Health care is another serious concern. Many employers don't offer health insurance. Many Latinos use the People's Clinic, but there are too many people and not enough time to serve them well. Often times, appointments are limited to 15 minutes, which isn't always enough time. Services are going down because there is such a big demand that can't be met. When the People's Clinic had a facility at San Juan, it was much better for people to get services there. Can it be reopened? Many people are afraid of going to the hospital for emergencies.
- **Shared Responsibility:** It is not just the City's responsibility to take care of needs. We need to do more for each other as a Latino community. We need to help connect people with the services they need and to share information with each other. The City can make improvements, but the City is doing some very good things and is not all bad.
- **Employment:** There should be effort to make sure that employers are treating employees fairly. It was noted that the Office of Human Rights with the City works on discrimination issues, and is available to provide assistance with these concerns (staff is bilingual).
- **Child care:** Many Latinos do not know that there is help available for child care through the City. It would be good to get this information out to the community.

Key Discussion Questions

The facilitators then asked participants to take a few moments to think about each of the questions, and beginning with the first question, write comments on the notepads provided and post comments on the sheets on the wall corresponding to each question. The facilitators then read the comments out loud for the group and organized them in categories, which was followed by group discussion.

Question 1: What can the City do to improve access to services for the Latino community?

City Administration:

- Staff Training re: Cultural Sensitivity/Multiculturalism
- More Bilingual/Bicultural Staff
- Awareness of Cultural/Societal Differences in Latino Community

- Disseminate information through existing trusted organizations that serve the Latino community
- Monthly publication in Spanish re: available services
- Provide financial resources for outreach
- Gatherings in locations where Latinos frequent: schools, churches, and other agencies
- Educate other ethnic/racial communities (Anglo, Asian, etc) of the important contributions of the Latino community

Business:

- Support and advice for small businesses

Recreation:

- Recruit youth for trainings re: informational campaigns for distribution of City news

Health Care:

- Need for more health clinics--there is a backlog of patients and long waiting periods to receive medical care

Civil Rights:

- Support for workers who face discrimination because of limited English proficiency

Housing:

- Assist Latino families in first time home ownership

Higher Education:

- Help to improve Latino high school graduates entry to institutions of higher education
- Provide better access for Latino students to the University of Colorado

Question 2: What services are needed and lacking (do not exist) in the City?

Civil Rights:

- Legal advocacy in cases of housing and employment discrimination
- Need for political support for the Latino community
- Supervision of contractors who abuse immigrant labor

Education:

- Access to higher education
- More GED programs
- Need for vocational training programs in Spanish language

Health Care:

- Preserve and enhance funding for health services to Latinos
- Need for quality/low cost medical care
- Need for affordable dental care

Non Profit Support:

- Increased financial support to agencies that serve the Latino community

Recreation:

- Access to recreation for families at the City recreation centers
- Affordable sport summer camps for youth
- Youth training programs on weekends

Leadership Training:

- Training and support services for future community leaders

Small Businesses:

- Support for Latino small businesses

Mental Health:

- Mental health support for Latino families as they adapt to different lifestyles and culture

Senior Services:

- Senior care and doctor home visits

Child Care:

- More quality child care centers for Latino immigrant children

Question 3: What ideas can you share that will help the City in its efforts to increase Latino civic participation and at what level?

Celebrations:

- Celebrate Latino traditions, such as independence days of different Latin American countries, and celebrations other than Cinco de Mayo (which really is not an important day of celebration for Mexico)

Education:

- Support the continuation of bilingual education

City Administration:

- Fire insensitive personnel who discriminate against Latinos
- Create Latino Advisory Committee
- Outreach from bilingual City staff re: City services
- Conduct Latino Immigrant Focus Groups with Police Department, City Attorney's Office, etc

Immigration:

- Support legislative efforts re: Driver's licenses for immigrants

English Language:

- Support for more efforts like Intercambio de Comunidades

Community Center:

- Need for a Latino Center in Boulder

Public Education:

- Informational campaign that focuses on the positive contributions of the Latino community in Boulder
- Public activities that contribute to cultural awareness/exchanges, Spanish classes
- Know Your Rights and Responsibilities Classes for Latino immigrants

Question 4: Other Ideas?

Promote:

- Help develop broader Latino leadership
- Provide leadership training for Latinos
- More information re: City services
- Latino Community Center
- Complaint/Suggestion Box for community Input

Follow Up:

- When is the next meeting to know of outcome of this meeting?
- What is the action plan re: meeting input?

Conclusion

Participants were thanked for their thoughtful and insightful comments, for a rich and useful discussion and for a very successful focus group. Everyone commended the facilitators on very productive session and a good meeting format and model that allowed for good input from all participants. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide comment to the City.

Staff indicated that notes would be provided to all participants. The information will be incorporated into the Housing and Human Services Master Plan, and will be very helpful as the Department lays out its plans for the future. Additionally, staff considers this input to be helpful beyond the Master Plan and will be sharing this with other city departments and officials.

Participants

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