

## **The Boulder City Council wants to hear from you**

Your voice matters. Whether you're a regular attendee at City Council meetings or someone who has ever said or felt, "We don't participate because we don't feel safe or heard," or "My friends and neighbors don't feel our needs and interests are priorities for the city," the Boulder City Council has undertaken a Community Dialogue Initiative that we believe not only illustrates how important the community's voice is to us, but implements effective tools for the city to hear your voices.

Parenting, careers, studies and active retirement mean that some of us aren't able to engage in civic life or speak out in sufficient numbers to make our views known.

While we recognize that some people simply choose not to attend City Council meetings to weigh in on city issues, we also know that some are not able to attend for a variety of reasons like the lack of affordable child care, transportation issues, or work schedules that prohibit attendance at City Council and other public meetings. In addition, we've talked with other residents in traditionally under-represented populations (youth, seniors, Latino/as, GLBTQ and people living with disabilities) who say they lack the opportunity to connect with the city organization.

We believe it's critical for the health of our community to acknowledge these real barriers and seek to reach those who cannot easily reach us. To us, not being able to participate is a true reality of our community, not apathy.

We have developed a process that we believe will ensure that Boulder is sustainable into the future, not only from environmental and economic perspectives, but also socially. Social sustainability means participatory governance with deliberate and inclusionary processes - considering the needs of all community members. This requires strengthening representation of all people in the decision-making process. The greater the participation in the governance process, the more well-informed policy decisions are and the better long-term outcomes are for meeting city goals. Understanding what a broad spectrum of our community thinks about a broad spectrum of issues requires mechanisms for input beyond what is allowed during public participation at council meetings.

The Community Dialogue we're about to launch will reach out to all segments of the community by using traditional survey techniques as well as non-traditional methods. First, a scientific, random-sample survey printed in English and in Spanish will be mailed to 3,500 Boulder residents. The survey will ask about a variety of city issues and about satisfaction levels with city services. This survey will be similar to past "Citizen Surveys," which were discontinued due to city budget cuts.

A second, less traditional method is called "Meetings-in-a-Box." The meetings are small group gatherings hosted by individuals, organizations, groups or businesses, where residents with all sorts of interests and backgrounds are welcome. Hosts are asked to convene a meeting in their homes, offices, or other comfortable, convenient places by inviting 10 to 15 people of their choosing to the meeting. The meetings are informal and

self-directed, without elected officials or staff present so that participants can feel free to speak their minds. We hope to have 40 of these meetings during September and October where people from all segments in our community -- the under-represented as described above, scientists, artists, service industry employees and entrepreneurs, to name a few examples -- can talk about issues that are important to them.

The results of the survey and “Meetings-in-a-Box” should provide a rich source of insight into the priority issues and concerns of Boulder residents. We plan to further explore these issues and have additional opportunities for input at Community Connector meetings early next year. These meetings will focus on particular topics that we heard about through either the survey or “Meetings-in-a-Box” and will seek to learn more about topics that residents have named as priorities.

Investing in public process is worth it. Boulder residents have informed and impacted the outcome of our master plans, public improvements plans, and area planning processes. Many residents have demanded (and received) increased opportunities for input when they’ve felt we weren’t listening to their concerns. City Council’s Community Sustainability Goal, while initiated by council, was created from an 18-month deliberate public process, engaging with a diverse number of Boulder residents who clearly identified the need for additional input from all community members.

Some residents have implied that we are wasting taxpayer dollars with this initiative and that those who do not come forward with their concerns have only their own lack of interest to blame. We believe that analysis is simplistic and does not acknowledge the inherent privilege in access. We believe that this Community Dialogue process is essential for residents to candidly and openly express how they wish to receive information from the city and what they want from their local government.

We deeply appreciate the community’s participation and input – we hope to learn a lot from you. So, if you receive a survey or would like to be considered as a host for a “Meeting-in-the-Box,” we look forward to hearing your voice!

For more information, contact Jean Gatza, city community sustainability coordinator, at [gatzaj@bouldercolorado.gov](mailto:gatzaj@bouldercolorado.gov) or (303) 441-4907.

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