



## INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

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Date: December 15, 2022

**Subject: Information Item: Update on the Downtown Streets as Public Space project  
(previously named West Pearl Update)**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memorandum serves as a progress update on the Downtown Streets as Public Space effort, previously named “West Pearl Update,” and last discussed at the Sept. 15, 2022 meeting of City Council. Staff have assembled resources to address council direction to conduct a community engagement process and feasibility/technical analysis to explore the potential of downtown streets as public space. A City Council Process Subcommittee, including Council Member Tara Winer and Council Member Matt Benjamin, has been formed and is actively meeting bi-weekly. Staff have established values, purpose, and goals and have developed an initial approach for the effort.

### FISCAL IMPACT

Funding for the effort will be sourced from the four departments involved in the effort: Planning & Development Services, Transportation & Mobility, Communication and Engagement, and Community Vitality. This includes contributions from 2022 cost savings and 2023 budget allocations. No additional funding is required for the current stage of the effort. Future public space installations envisioned for spring and summer of 2023 may necessitate additional funding requests. Consultant assistance will explore potential scope, materials, operational considerations, and associated costs to better determine future funding needs.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, west Pearl Street, from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> streets and part of 10<sup>th</sup> Street were closed to respond to and recover from the effects of the pandemic. These blocks of the west Pearl Street area were temporarily repurposed as space for outdoor dining, gathering, programming, and activation. Concrete k-rail was placed at block ends to prohibit vehicular access and allow for the placement of street furniture within the roadway, such as tables, chairs, and umbrellas. With the end of COVID-19 emergency orders, the City of Boulder reallocated vehicular access on these few blocks in the west Pearl Street area in late September 2022.

At the Sept. 15, 2022, City Council meeting, there was a discussion regarding the planned end of the COVID-19 related temporary vehicle closure of west Pearl Street and next steps regarding exploration of street repurposing. Community sentiment expressed during the temporary repurposing of west Pearl Street, and through email and in public comment at the Sept. 15, 2022, City Council meeting, revealed a significant appetite for more pedestrianized spaces in the downtown area. Direction from City Council to city staff was to conduct a prompt and responsive public engagement process to understand community desires for future opportunities within the downtown district (generally defined as the [Central Area General Improvement District](#) [CAGID]). The focus will be on periodic, seasonal, or temporary repurposing of roadway space as public space and programming through cultural events, public art, and other activations. The desired outcomes of this initiative, based on the feedback from council, are (i) feasible near-term actions that can be realized for the spring and summer months of 2023, and (ii) longer-term recommendations and next steps for more transformational, systematic or permanent changes.

## **PROJECT VALUES, PURPOSE, AND GOALS**

### **Values**

Based on previous engagement and master planning efforts, staff recognizes that the Boulder community values:

- Inclusive and meaningful engagement feedback that reflects a range of opinions and voices in significant projects and decision-making;
- A culture and practice of innovation to improve and meet evolving needs;
- The vibrancy and economic vitality of its downtown, and having inclusive spaces for use by all community members and visitors, so anyone who wants to, can enjoy them; and
- Safe travel and access opportunities by all transportation modes and users.

### **Purpose**

This project will develop recommendations for near-term and longer-term reimagining of streets as public space in the downtown informed by community engagement, technical engineering, and feasibility analysis. These recommendations may include a range of temporary and permanent options for physical modifications, changes to vehicular access/circulation, programs and activities, or procedures for adjacent property requests to transform how specific street locations are currently utilized. The project will also lead to a variety of initial installations in the downtown area in the Spring/Summer of 2023 to explore different types of programmatic and

physical features, understand their unique benefits, and weigh issues and tradeoffs for future application and discussion of this topic.

This initiative will balance a carefully managed timeline that recognizes the significant community interest in action with a commitment to:

- Build upon previous engagement and gather additional focused feedback to clearly understand the needs, desires, and concerns regarding the use of public right-of-way in the downtown area by the range of community interests and diverse stakeholders.
- Provide an opportunity to test and learn from the 2023 installations and existing public spaces that accommodate periodic, seasonal, and temporary cultural events, public art and other activations in the downtown, including popularity, inclusivity, accessibility, functionality and other criteria.
- Create a thoughtful, bold, and creative set of recommendations that addresses differing needs and desires for a holistic and long-term approach to downtown streets as public space, which can be used to inform other citywide policy discussions and related downtown planning efforts.

## **Project Goals**

*Goal 1: Collectively reflect, learn from, and build on a variety of experiences and priorities*

- Learn from people's experiences with downtown street spaces through temporary and semi-permanent interventions and events that provide opportunities for feedback; seek perspectives from diverse groups; and develop collective understanding of people's differing experiences and likes and dislikes.

*Goal 2: Ensure that recommendations for downtown streets as public space reflect diverse community voices and the feasibility and technical analysis of the issues considered.*

- Conduct focused and time-limited engagement to ensure a fuller understanding of the community's aspirations for downtown streets as public space, including the perspectives of historically underrepresented communities
- Refine the list of requirements and specifications necessary to address sometimes competing needs related to street closures
- Facilitate a process where people work towards refining and balancing options, a shared vision, and generating win-win solutions. Aim to mitigate or avoid adverse impacts. Be transparent in sharing any necessary trade-offs.

*Goal 3: Develop a series of feasible and exciting recommendations to implement this spring/summer that will test ideas for reimagining streets in one or more downtown locations.*

- Draw inspiration from recent local, national, and international examples of streets as public space that are responsive to community aspirations and operational feasibility
- Utilize a variety of short-term installations and activations of modest cost and effort to refine ideas for longer-term, potentially permanent changes

*Goal 4: Utilize the project outcomes to inform upcoming planning efforts and future policy discussions about streets as public space in the city.*

- Utilize the project's work and recommendations to help inform upcoming efforts and discussions about the Core Arterial Network downtown mobility study, Civic Area and Arboretum parks

improvements, East Bookend land use planning, potential Pearl Street Mall infrastructure revitalization, and University Hill-Downtown connectivity.

- Define next steps for exploring the topic of reimagining streets as public space in other areas of the city and communicate the timeline of future phases to the community and decision-makers.

## **PROJECT APPROACH AND TIMELINE**

In response to council direction, staff have assembled the following resources to conduct a community engagement effort to inform technical recommendations for Spring/Summer 2023 and beyond.

1. Internal City Staff Project Team
2. City Council Process Subcommittee
3. Consultant Assistance

These resources are described in more detail below.

### **Internal City Staff Project Team**

The City Manager’s Office has tasked multiple departments with conducting the “Downtown Streets as Public Space” effort, including Planning & Development Services, Transportation & Mobility, Communication & Engagement, and Community Vitality. Staff leads have subsequently been identified from each department and the internal city staff project team has been meeting regularly since mid-September 2022. In October and November 2022, the internal city staff project team also conducted two initial City Council Process Subcommittee meetings and began procurement for consultant assistance.

### **City Council Process Subcommittee**

A City Council Process Subcommittee was formed in October 2022 at the direction of council. Two members of council, Council Member Tara Winer and Council Member Matt Benjamin, will serve on the process subcommittee along with Planning & Development Services Director Brad Mueller, Transportation & Mobility Interim Director Natalie Stiffler, Communication & Engagement Director Sarah Huntley, and Community Vitality Interim Director Cris Jones. Support staff and consultant team members will also attend process subcommittee meetings. The purpose of the process subcommittee is to confirm next steps for the community engagement process, to gain feedback from council members on alignment of the process with council’s goals and intent for the effort, and to allow for progress check-ins along the way.

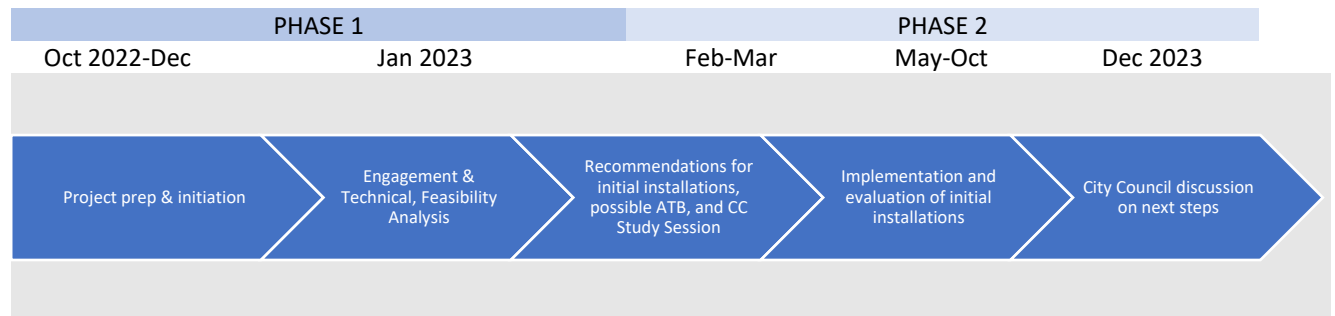
### **Consultant Assistance and Tentative Scope of Work**

Staff are currently finalizing consultant procurement for the Downtown Streets as Public Space effort and have communicated the project’s goals, purpose, and timeline, as well as specific council direction, to potential contract partners. The initial preferred emphasis established by council was on three specific street segments – west Pearl Street between 11th and 9th streets, 13th Street between Canyon Boulevard and Arapahoe Avenue, and 10th Street between Pearl Street and the Morrison Alley – as potential candidates for increased pedestrianization and community activation. There was, however, also some interest expressed in creating room through dialogue for consideration of other downtown streets. The project scoping reflects this feedback.

Inclusive, meaningful, and effective engagement for this project is critical to ensure that Downtown Boulder provides experiences that are not only open to all – but are welcoming, comfortable, and valued by all. This area of town – arguably the heart of the city – is a significant asset that has a unique ability to bring people together and build community. Community engagement for the Downtown Streets as Public Space effort should help ensure that recommendations reflect the community’s aspirations and diverse needs while also aligning with city’s mobility, placemaking, public safety, racial equity, resilience and sustainability goals. Given the desire to develop recommendations in the first few months of 2023, the level of engagement will be ‘consult’ as defined by the [city’s engagement spectrum](#). While the city and consultants will provide some opportunities for additional input in late 2022 and early 2023, including potential testing of ideas through the spring and summer of 2023, the intent is to draw from the significant community input shared prior to council’s Sept. 15, 2022, meeting, as well as valuable input from community connectors on related downtown-related planning efforts. Deeper levels of engagement may be considered for the formulation of long-term recommendations based in part on the learnings from the spring/summer 2023 installations.

The staff team will be utilizing a consultant team to provide the project management, community engagement and urban design, placemaking and engineering analysis expertise, and resource capacity for this effort. This work will produce recommendations to inform the near-term actions and longer-term recommendations and action plan for future activations informed by community engagement, technical and feasibility analysis.

## Timeline



### Phase 1

#### *Fall 2022 – Mar 2023*

- Develop near-term recommendations and locations for downtown streets as public space in spring/summer 2023 informed by feasibility, technical and community feedback analyses
- Present findings to City Council (study session currently scheduled for March 23, 2023)

#### *Mar-May 2023*

- Preparations and permitting for 2023 initial installations

## **Phase 2**

*May-Sep/Oct 2023*

- Test and evaluate 2023 downtown streets as public space initial installations
- Update downtown streets as public space recommendations with findings

*Late Fall 2023*

- Present findings to City Council and gain feedback on staff recommendations for next steps
- Next steps may include policy or regulatory updates, more detailed design and implementation plans, or evaluation for application in other areas of the city

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff expect to finalize the scope of work and contractual negotiations with the consultant team in the next few weeks, with a kickoff meeting planned before the end of the year. Immediate tasks include completing a preliminary assessment of this effort using the racial equity instrument and organizing initial community outreach, which will include project launch messaging as well as a digital feedback form open through the holiday season and into next year.