

**CITY OF BOULDER  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

**MEETING DATE: January 19, 2023**

**AGENDA TITLE**

Recommendations from Council Subcommittee on Engagement and a Welcoming Council Environment.

**PRESENTERS**

Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager  
Sarah Huntley, Communication & Engagement Director  
Ryan Hanschen, Community Engagement Manager  
Elesha Johnson, City Clerk  
Taylor Reiman, City Council Administrator  
Pam Davis, Assistant City Manager

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ON SUBCOMMITTEE**

Rachel Friend  
Bob Yates

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this item is to respond to council feedback about public participation during City Council meetings, share proposed changes to City Council meeting protocols, and seek input from council on several items. This memo will outline some of the items that have surfaced, include some updates, and detail additional options for council to consider and potentially adopt in the future.

## **COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS**

- **Economic** - Advances in meaningful and inclusive engagement practices will help to ensure more thorough decision-making, increase the diversity of public participation, and build trust between community members and city government.
- **Environmental** – n/a
- **Social** - Advances in meaningful and inclusive engagement practices will help to ensure more thorough decision-making, increase the diversity of public participation, and build trust between community members and city government.

## **OTHER IMPACTS**

- Fiscal – Budgetary impacts to the city organization would be minimal.
- Staff time – Implementation of recommended changes can likely be incorporated into existing work plans.

## **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL AGENDA COMMITTEE**

None.

## **BOARD AND COMMISSION FEEDBACK**

None.

## **PUBLIC FEEDBACK**

Staff have heard feedback from community members and council indicating support for additional Chat/Walk with Council opportunities. Staff heard this feedback during Chats/Walks with Council and have also observed healthy numbers of community members participating as well as engaging with council members in more back-and-forth dialogue.

There has also been some input from the community on hybrid council meetings since Summer 2022, when this program was implemented, including a request from some council members for clarity on opportunities for virtual meeting participation.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Council Subcommittee on Engagement and a Welcoming Council Environment is considering several changes to public participation protocols during council meetings that

are intended to increase meaningful engagement and the effectiveness of community members' testimony.

The issues to be discussed fall into one of four categories:

1. Updates related to Council Correspondence;
2. Expectations for Hybrid Council Attendance;
3. Improvements related to Chats and Walks with Council; and
4. Improvements related to Open Comment and Public Hearings.

## **ANALYSIS**

Under each of the four categories listed above, staff and council subcommittee members have included several updates and identified several potential changes the subcommittee would like to bring to the full council for consideration.

### **1. Updates related to Council Correspondence**

As City Council may recall, the city initiated a new approach to council correspondence in early 2022. The change was designed to move this communication away from Outlook, which was proving to be both cumbersome and ineffective, to a transitional system that involves community members completing a form. The form, in English and Spanish, allows the constituent to indicate the topic they are writing about as well as whether they wish the communication to go to council, staff, or both.

The system has streamlined the back-end management of these emails considerably and allowed the city to perform data analysis that was not possible previously. Attachment A of this memo is a year-end report on the new system.

One of the reasons behind the change was to make it easier for staff and council to identify emails that might need a response. The new system has helped with this; however, staff recognizes that more needs to be done to ensure that community members are receiving responses, when appropriate and especially in cases where they are seeking readily available information. The subcommittee and staff are in alignment on a few incremental changes to the form system that could help address this.

Before these are detailed, it might help council members to know that additional tracking capabilities are envisioned as a part of the upcoming Constituent Relationship Management project. This project was delayed in 2022 due to prioritization of other key projects. However, the Innovation and Technology Department has shared that this work will resume, starting in 2023, in phases, as shown here:

	Phase Name	Challenges Addressed
Phase 0 (begin Jan. 2023)	Rescoping / Discovery / Procurement	
Phase 1	Constituent Ticketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Inquire Boulder</li> <li>•Council Email</li> <li>•Council Hotline</li> </ul>
Phase 2	Operational Integrations	•Lack of actionable tasks from inquiries
Phase 3	Engagement Platform	TBD

You will see that Phase 1 includes addressing known issues related to council correspondence and council Hotline. While the exact timing will be determined through scoping work, the goal is to complete Phase 1 by the end of 2023.

In the meantime, as mentioned previously, staff and the subcommittee are seeking the full council's feedback on two changes to the form system. These are as follows:

Potential Changes	Request of Council	Subcomm. Support?	Considerations/ Implications
Eliminate option for community member to choose who correspondence is sent to. Currently, the person filling out the form can choose just Council, just Staff, or Staff and Council.	Council input is needed	Yes	This change would help to ensure that staff assigned to specific topics are seeing all form submissions related to their areas of expertise. Staff members are expected to evaluate whether a staff response would be helpful. As a reminder, the expectation is that assigned staff, usually a director, respond to questions or requests for more information in correspondence to council that comes in through the form system within three business days. Staff is not expected to respond to communication in which a constituent is simply communicating with their elected officials about

			their preferred position on an issue. When staff responds, they will ensure that the response is shared with council members.
Eliminate topic option of “Feedback on Pending Council Action” and ensure that council priorities are listed under Hot Topics and reviewed regularly by Communications staff.	Council input is needed	Yes	Both these changes are designed to ensure that the correct subject matter experts are seeing – and have an opportunity to respond, if appropriate – to the communication coming into council.

## 2. Expectations for Hybrid Council Attendance

Potential Changes	Request of Council	Subcomm. Support?	Considerations/ Implications
Set expectations for hybrid council attendance, including number of council members in Chambers during meetings and number of meetings that council members may join remotely each year	Council input is needed	Yes	As a starting point for this discussion, council could consider: no more than two council members may participate in an in-person meeting remotely (first come, first served, with notifications of intentions expressed to the City Clerk and recorded in the CAC agenda and summaries). And no council member may participate remotely in more than three in-person council meetings per calendar year.

### **3. Improvements related to Chats and Walks with Council**

Chats and Walks with Council have existed in the city since 2019. As we prepare for a discussion about their future, it may be helpful to take a quick look at their history.

The original pilot effort stemmed from a desire by council to engage with community members beyond what is possible in the time-limited open comment and public hearing context. The city held several staff-supported chats that year with a range of participation from 50 at one to 2 at another.

After the first year of the programming, staff returned to council to seek feedback. In general, the feedback was positive and led to a decision to continue to effort. There was, however, a request at that time to design the sessions in ways that accomplished the following:

1. For chats, emphasize participation and a welcoming environment for individuals who historically do not participate in council meetings; and
2. For walks, emphasize inclusivity AND choose routes and itineraries that showcased city initiatives or a complicated policy issue that could be a focal point of the walk.

This direction has guided staff's work in this space since that time.

In 2022, the city hosted six Chats and Walks with Council and engaged approximately 195 community members. Four Chats with Council were held in partnership with Community Connectors-in-Residence and our Nepali community, Naropa University, City of Boulder Climate Initiatives, Boulder Housing Partners, and Boulder Public Library and two Walks with Council were held in partnership with Fairview High School and University of Colorado.

Major conversation themes from 2022 Chats and Walks with Council included (in order of frequency) affordable housing, homelessness, city resources and how to access them, supportive services (e.g., mental health, addiction recovery, people with disabilities), public safety, and climate action and environment.

Positive feedback from 2022 Chats and Walks with Council included acknowledgement of low barrier participation – organic conversations, no sign-up or registration required, most events planned where people already are, interpretation support (for three Chats); engagement with diverse community members; and accompanying with existing events allowed for engagement with representatives with local partner organizations.

Please see Attachment B for a recap of 2022 Chats and Walks with Council and Attachment C for a summary of proposed opportunities for council members to engage in two-way dialogue with community members.

Potential Changes	Request of Council	Subcomm. Support?	Considerations/ Implications
Continue Chats and Walks with Council to include more options for two-way dialogue with community members.	Council input requested	Yes	To implement six Chats/Walks in 2023, council members would need to commit to 1-2 Chats/Walks with Council per year. Two council members would participate in each two-hour Chat/Walk with Council session and locations would rotate throughout the city. Times/days of the week may vary, and Saturday mornings seem to work well for community members. During council election years, only council members who are NOT running for reelection may participate in Chats or Walks between mid-August to mid-November.
Consider adding two additional Chats each year that provide an avenue for council to engage on specific and timely topics.	Council input requested	Yes	To stand-up these Chats, at least three council members would need to initiate and participate, giving staff at least three weeks lead-time for planning and coordination. During council election years, only council members who are NOT running for reelection may

			participate in Chats or Walks between mid-August to mid-November.
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#### 4. Improvements related to Open Comment and Public Hearings

With the goal of ensuring a welcoming council environment, the following potential changes are proposed to Open Comment, Public Hearings, and Council Chambers.

Potential Changes	Request of Council	Subcomm. Support?	Considerations/ Implications
Eliminate community member slideshows during Open Comment and Public Hearing, to reflect a more equitable hybrid approach and to align with CAO recommendation.	Input from council needed	Yes	From time to time, community members request to display presentations they have created when testifying before council. This has been raised as an area of concern by the City Attorney's Office. There is no process for staff review of these presentations and even if there were, it would be challenging for the city to make content-based decisions about which to allow and which to prohibit. In addition, there are equity concerns related to some community members having access to the tools and knowledge to create these and others not. The recommendation is to prohibit them entirely to



			address both these concerns and create a level playing field for individuals sharing their input with council. Community members who wish to share slides or photos with council could still do so through the Contact Council form process. This would require a rule change.
Revise Council Rules of Decorum to address community member signs in Chambers, ensuring that sign size not block view or take neighbor's space and to clarify that seats are for people.	Input from council needed	Yes	As council has returned to Chambers, there has been a noticeable trend of community members placing signs in the seats in the front rows. The recommendation is for a rule change that would make clear that seats are for people not signs and that staff will remove signs that are placed in chairs. All other provisions about not blocking people's views or taking up your neighbor's space would still apply.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Reflecting on the will of council, staff may implement proposed changes outlined above.

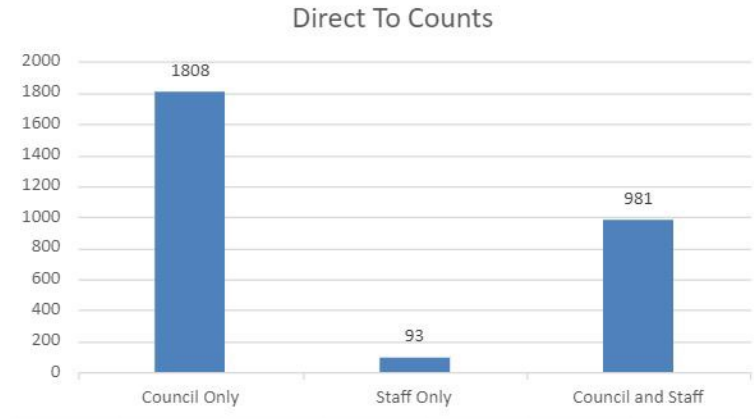
## **ATTACHMENTS**

- A) Council Contact Form 2022 Data Report
- B) Recap of 2022 Council Chats and Walks
- C) Proposed 2023 opportunities for Staff Supported Council Engagement

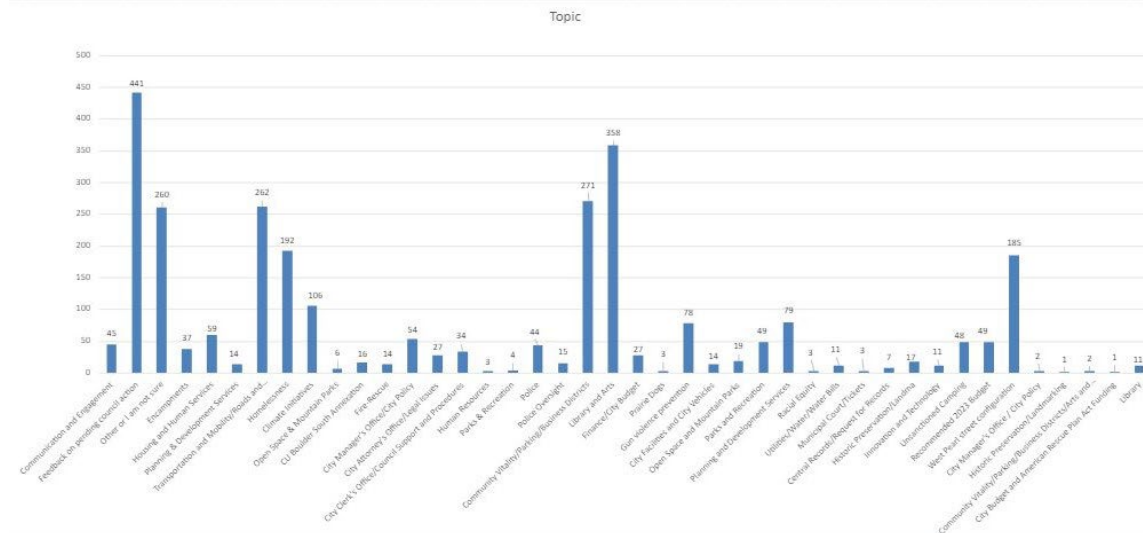
## City Council Contact Form 2022 Data Report

During 2022, community members utilized the [City Council Contact Form](#) a total of 2,882 times.

In submitting the form, community members could choose their recipient: council only, staff only, or council and staff. Recipient data may be found below:



In submitting the form, community members could also choose their topic. Topic data may be found below in both chart and table format:



Topics	Counts
Communication and Engagement	45
Feedback on pending council action	441
Other or I am not sure	260
Encampments	37
Housing and Human Services	59
Planning & Development Services	14

Transportation and Mobility/Roads and Paths/Traffic/Cars/Bikes/Pedestrians/Airport/Snow Removal	262
Homelessness	192
Climate Initiatives	106
Open Space & Mountain Parks	6
CU Boulder South Annexation	16
Fire-Rescue	14
City Manager's Office/City Policy	54
City Attorney's Office/Legal Issues	27
City Clerk's Office/Council Support and Procedures	34
Human Resources	3
Parks & Recreation	4
Police	44
Police Oversight	15
Community Vitality/Parking/Business Districts	271
Library and Arts	358
Finance/City Budget	27
Prairie Dogs	3
Gun violence prevention	78
City Facilities and City Vehicles	14
Open Space and Mountain Parks	19
Parks and Recreation	49
Planning and Development Services	79
Racial Equity	3
Utilities/Water/Water Bills	11
Municipal Court/Tickets	3
Central Records/Request for Records	7
Historic Preservation/Landmarking	17
Innovation and Technology	11
Unsanctioned Camping	48
Recommended 2023 Budget	49
West Pearl street configuration	185
City Manager's Office / City Policy	2
Historic Preservation/Landmarking	1
Community Vitality/Parking/Business Districts/Arts and Culture	2
City Budget and American Rescue Plan Act Funding	1
Library	11
<b>Total Submissions</b>	<b>2882</b>



# WALK WITH COUNCIL

April 20, 2022

WITH FAIRVIEW  
HIGHSCHOOL  
STUDENTS



## CONVERSATION THEMES

- CLIMATE ACTION
- NATURAL DISASTER RESILIENCY
- HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING
- PUBLIC SAFETY - ENCAMPMENTS

## HIGHLIGHTS

- ONE MILE WALK AROUND VIELE LAKE
- 24 PARTICIPANTS
- COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: AARON BROCKETT, RACHEL FRIEND, MATT BENJAMIN



## Chat with Council Recap

Sunday, May 15 2022

Foothills Community Park



### Highlights

- In collaboration with Community Connectors, members of Boulder's Nepalese community joined council members to enjoy lunch and talk about issues that matter to them most, supported by interpretation and translation. Staff have followed up on several resource requests.
- Participants: 21
- Council Representatives: Mayor Aaron Brockett and Mayor Pro Tem Rachel Friend

### Conversation Themes

- Public Safety
- Rent Prices/Rental Assistance
- Health care
- Services for adults with disabilities
- Noise
- Immigration



# CHAT WITH COUNCIL

August 31, 2022

WITH NAROPA  
UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT  
ORGANIZATION FAIR



## CONVERSATION THEMES

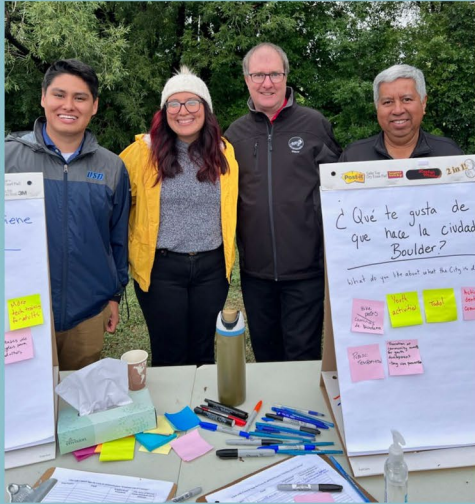
- HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING, AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES
- MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION
- ADDICTION RECOVERY AND ACCESS TO NARCAN AND FENTANYL TESTING
- COMMUNITY INCLUSION

## HIGHLIGHTS

- COUNCIL MEMBERS JOINED A TABLING EVENT TO ENGAGE WITH NAROPA STUDENTS AND FACULTY
- 30 PARTICIPANTS
- COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: NICOLE SPEER AND MATT BENJAMIN



## CHAT WITH COUNCIL



September 10, 2022  
**With residents of the Orchard  
Grove Manufactured Home  
Community**



### Highlights

- Partnered with Community Resource Fiesta and Recycling/Clean-Up Day
- 50 participants
- Council Representatives: Aaron Brockett, Nicole Speer, Mark Wallach

### Conversation Themes

- Homelessness
- Community programs offered in Spanish
- Affordable housing
- Accessing city services







## CHAT WITH COUNCIL



September 23, 2022  
**With residents of Boulder  
Housing Partners communities**



### Highlights

- Free book giveaway sponsored by the Boulder Public Library and Boulder Housing Partners at the annual Book Rich Environment Event
- Participants 40
- Supported with Spanish interpretation
- Council Representatives: Aaron Brockett, Nicole Speer

### Conversation Themes

- City resources and how to access them
- Election cycles and council member terms
- North Boulder Library construction



# WALK WITH COUNCIL

October 1, 2022

At University of Colorado  
Boulder South Campus



## Highlights

- Toured part of the CU South campus, shared information and addressed questions
- 30 participants
- Council Representatives:  
Rachel Friend,  
Matt Benjamin



## Conversation Themes

- Environmental aspects of the property
- Flood protection
- Historic, current, and future uses
- Development considerations



**Proposed 2023 Opportunities for Staff Supported Council Engagement**

	<b>Chats &amp; Walks</b>	<b>Council-initiated Chats</b>	<b>Office Hours</b>
Purpose	Chats focus on specific communities; Walks featuring specific locations	Responsive to specific and time-sensitive topics	Open-ended conversation
Topic or Focus	Council nominates, staff confirm with partners	Initiated by at least three council members	Community member initiated
Frequency (max)	6 per year	2 per year, with at least a month in between	n/a
Council Member #s	2-3 council members	At least 3 council members, others may join	1-2 council members, 2 recommended (3 or more must be open meeting)
Community Member #s	Ideally 20-40 participants	Ideal for larger groups of community members	Ideal for individuals or small groups
Planning/Requests	Biannually staff will solicit council suggestions for annual planning cycle	At least 3 council members must express interest and commit to participation	Contact City Council Administrator to set up
Staff Support – Planning	Staff coordinate logistics	Staff coordinate logistics	Blurb and Calendly customized as needed
Staff Support – During	Facilitation as needed, participant sign-in, note-taking, photography, customized resources provided, potentially activities	Potentially loose facilitation as needed	n/a
Staff Support – After	Recaps provided, support with individual follow up as needed	Support with follow up questions as needed	Support with follow up questions as needed
Staff Subject Matter Experts	Often SMEs participating	Invited SMEs as available	n/a
Outreach	Staff create materials (e.g., social media post, flyer) and outreach through partners	Staff create materials (e.g., social media post, flyer) and outreach through city channels	Blurb template and Calendly link provided
Lead-time for Planning	Annual planning cycle	Three weeks	Three days

Location	Staff and partners identify and confirm	Council nominates, staff confirm	Council identified and scheduled
Security	Potential for BPD presence as anticipated	Potential for BPD presence as anticipated	Info provided to participating council members
Refreshments	Water and snacks provided	n/a	n/a

\*During council election years, only council members who are NOT running for reelection may participate in Chats, Walks, or Forums between mid-August to mid-November.