



## INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

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Date: Aug. 17, 2023

**Subject: Information Item: Update on the Boulder Social Streets project**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning & Development Services (P&DS), Transportation & Mobility (T&M), Community Vitality (CV) and Communication and Engagement (C&E) departments have embarked on an effort in 2023 to reimagine streets as public space for people to come to enjoy and connect. This project arose in 2022, as the city reopened West Pearl to vehicular operations following the closure that was in place during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency declaration. A considerable number of community members expressed interest in more and different types of public space uses within streets in the downtown area than is currently offered. This led to a conversation on Sept. 15, 2022, with City Council, which resulted in a project to pilot additional use of downtown public space in mid-2023, further engage and reach out to the community (businesses and public), gather data, and conduct technical analysis. A City Council Process Subcommittee that included staff, consultants, and Councilmembers Tara Winer and Matt Benjamin guided the development of the project.

This project included technical work in early 2023 to understand the feasibility of various options and engagement to further understand our community's preferences. City staff partnered with internationally recognized public space experts to evaluate opportunities, identify locations, and strategize activities most likely to succeed in Boulder. This led to the development of an Action Plan recommending various typologies for piloting this summer to help inform future next steps. The Action Plan also outlined goals for this summer's testing which included facilitating more community connections, expanding downtown beyond the mall, better connecting the pedestrian and bike network, supporting businesses, influencing future street transformations and informing Downtown initiatives and projects.

Based on the [Action Plan recommendations](#) and Council feedback at the March 23, 2023 Study Session, staff is implementing a program that consists of a regular cadence of pop-ups on 13<sup>th</sup> Street to test a regular cadence of streets closures and activations, outreach to West Pearl property and business owners including interest in Common Consumption, use and opinion data gathering, and exploring of permanent options for 2024 and beyond. The sum of these efforts will be examined in detail in the fall, with the intent of providing conclusions and recommendations for the future.

The pop-up is located on 13<sup>th</sup> Street and includes the occasional closure of 13<sup>th</sup> Street to vehicular traffic from Arapahoe Avenue to Canyon Boulevard and eight (8) activations in this street space from June through September. More details of the pop-ups can be found at: <https://boulderdowntown.com/events/boulder-social-streets>. The project team (with consultant support) will evaluate the Boulder Social Streets on 13<sup>th</sup> pop-up activations to understand if the pop-up series achieved the Action Plan goals and to inform recommendations for next steps.

Initial outreach to West Pearl businesses and property owners was conducted in April-May with little interest in closure of this area at the time. Now that the pop-ups have launched, staff can turn their attention to additional outreach in August, inviting them to share their thoughts and perspectives on reimagining streets for public space opportunities at various upcoming listening sessions.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

The cost for this phase of pop-ups activations, evaluation and recommendations development totals \$360,000. This is an addition to the \$200,000 to plan for and design the program. While the CV Department provided most of the funding, T&M, P&DS and C&E made contributions as well. These figures do not include staff time on this project.

Based on preliminary findings and insights from public space experts, staff has concluded that merely providing incremental additions to historic event programming will not succeed in meeting the goal of completely reimagining street uses and has, as such, proposed the creation of a new fully-funded program. A request for 2024 funding to formalize such a future citywide program is being contemplated but will be dependent on funding availability in 2024 and beyond.

## **BACKGROUND**

This project team was tasked with creating temporary change to public streets downtown in the short term, and experimenting with converting roadway into people-centered places through a

variety of tactics including events, activities, new and temporary physical features, and street closures.

As discussed with Council at the March 23 Study Session, the project sought to and prioritized the following goals and key issues:

- **Goal 1:** Collectively reflect, learn from, and build on a variety of experiences and priorities
- **Goal 2:** Ensure that recommendations for downtown streets as public space reflect diverse community voices as well as solid feasibility and technical analyses
- **Goal 3:** Develop a series of achievable and exciting recommendations to implement this summer that will test ideas for reimagining streets
- **Goal 4:** Utilize the project outcomes to inform upcoming planning efforts and future policy discussion about streets as public space in the city

Based on Council discussion, the project team moved forward with the Boulder Social Streets on 13<sup>th</sup> Street pilot and outreach to the West Pearl business community.

***Update:***

Public spaces need people to feel vibrant, inviting, and safe. To justify a street closure, the team determined Boulder would need an area that consistently draws heavy foot traffic at all times of the day and week, including well into the night. Grounded in the consultant’s recommendations and experience, street closures should only take place when the street is activated and/or when adjacent businesses are inviting or requesting a closure, and it takes significant resources to make active places. To be most efficient and have the greatest chance of success, it was recommended that Boulder should concentrate its limited resources and constrained timeline on locations and times where spaces already feel vibrant, which led us to 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Boulder Social Streets on 13th pop-ups include eight activations on 13<sup>th</sup> Street between Arapahoe Avenue and Canyon Boulevard. Following a request for bids that included two submittals, Downtown Boulder Partnership’s Community Initiatives was selected and is providing the pop-ups management service this summer. The scope includes design and implementation of the pop-ups with inclusive programming that appeals to a range of ages, income levels and cultures, as well as efforts to bring a diversity of vendors and community members together as outlined in the project’s racial equity action plan. Additionally, the city has been working with the Community Connectors-in-Residence to help with pop-ups promotion within their networks and communities, and staff is promoting Social Streets on 13<sup>th</sup> at the various resource fairs in manufactured housing communities from June to September.

The dates and themes of the eight pop-ups on 13<sup>th</sup> Street are as follows:

- Sunday, June 25th - Rollerpalooza
- Friday, July 21st – Dancing in the Street
- Sunday, July 30th - Picnic in the Street
- Friday, August 4th - Yappy Hour

- Sunday, August 13th - Street Soccer
- Friday, August 25th – Melanin Funk Festival
- Friday, September 8th - CU Athletes Meet & Greet
- Sunday, September 24th - Community Art Day

More details of the pop-ups can be found at: <https://boulderdowntown.com/events/boulder-social-streets>.

Evaluation of the Boulder Social Streets on 13<sup>th</sup> pop-ups is taking place to understand if the pop-up series achieved the goals in the Action Plan and to also inform recommended next steps.

As of this memo submittal deadline, four of the eight pop-up activations have occurred. For the first four pop-ups, estimated attendance ranged between 100 and 250 people at each pop-up. There were several broad engagement activities with a total of over 30 interviews and 40 on-line questionnaire responses gathered between the two pop-ups as well as over 190 individual responses to the chalkboard and photo board activities. The city is also leading an experiential evaluation group of about 15 community members with diverse backgrounds. This group will help evaluate the summer efforts in more depth and provide input on the priorities for a potential future program.

The other key component of this summer work is to reach out to West Pearl businesses and property owners to update them on the Boulder Social Streets project, and invite them to share their thoughts and perspectives on reimagining streets for public space opportunities. Communication to businesses and property owners will include a link to information about Common Consumption areas, which can be a component of reimagined streets. Initial outreach occurred in April-May with some business and property owners, who expressed little interest in closure of this area at the time. Additional, more extensive outreach will take place at listening sessions in August. Engagement with the businesses to gain their business perspective and feedback will be helpful in shaping a future city-wide program, while also continuing to explore workable options in partnership with them at West Pearl.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following the pop-ups pilot, the team will complete its evaluation and develop next step recommendations to City Council in late fall 2023.