



STUDY SESSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Members of City Council

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DATE: December 14, 2023

SUBJECT: Civic Area Project Study Session

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study session is to present an overview of the next phase of implementing the [2015 Civic Area Plan](#) and to gather input from City Council on the planning process and engagement plan. This session provides an overview of the:

- **Project History** – Outline the previous planning efforts that led to the approved 2015 Civic Area Plan which will guide the next phase of design and implementation. This information can also be found in the [Information Packet to Council sent in September 21, 2023](#).
- **Initial phase 1 park improvements** – These improvements are located between the North Wing of the Main Library and the Penfield Tate II

Municipal Building, and they outline the enhancement of the park, space activation, and creek access that has been constructed to date.

- **Design process** – The next phase of the park and arboretum path design will include planning analysis and more detailed design (schematic design) of the Civic Area. A deeper dive into the details of site design will lead to a better understanding of funding needs and support decision-making on the final limit of work for construction in this next phase. The East and West Bookends of the Civic Area will undergo a separate land use process that will occur on its own timeline. This is meant to ensure flexibility in the planning process, support development opportunities, and integrate with the overall implementation of the Civic Area plan.
- **Engagement plan** – This will include a robust outreach effort to ensure broad and diverse input from the community throughout the Civic Area project design process is incorporated. Using the City of Boulder’s Strategic Engagement Framework and the Equity Instrument, city staff will work to ensure all voices will be heard and used to inform the outcomes of this effort.

In describing the scope for this next phase of work, it is important to also clarify there is a larger city-wide effort to coordinate all projects within downtown Boulder. City staff are coordinating closely to ensure alignment with community engagement efforts and synergy in the downtown area (project coordination includes, but is not limited to, Boulder Social Streets, Facilities Plan implementation, RTD Bus Gate Expansion and the Application for Historic District Designation). Council is scheduled to learn more and discuss the wider downtown coordination effort during the January 25, 2024 Study Session and will receive an update on the Facilities Plan implementation effort on January 11, 2024.

City Council approved 2024 budget which included \$18M from the voter-approved Community, Culture, Resilience and Safety Tax (CCRS) in planned spending through 2027. The funds will be used to support the next phase of Civic Area implementation. Not all the Civic Area implementation can be completed with the current allocation. As outlined in the Civic Area Plan, full implementation of the park and civic spaces (not including the cost of any changes to buildings) would exceed \$40M based on current cost estimating. Therefore, this design process will result in a schematic design with cost estimates that will inform decision-making on which spaces in the Civic Area will move to construction in the next phase.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL

1. Does council have any questions regarding the context and history of the Civic Area project?
2. Does council have any questions or comments about the design process (scope and schedule) for this project?
3. Does council have input on the public engagement that will begin in the spring of 2024?
4. Does council have any comments on the Design Principles from the 2015 Civic Area Plan as a guiding framework for the next phase of design?

KEY GOALS

Project Vision

Boulder has routinely been named one of the top places in America to call home, and in keeping with this charge, the Civic Area project is critical to maintaining this way of life. We have the opportunity at the heart of downtown to continue the ambitious urban design work that has begun in the Civic Area to ensure a strong connection to nature, promote the robust local economy, support the dynamic art scene, and continue to cultivate Boulder's thriving culture.

The project vision encompasses the makings of a beautiful recreational river park at the core, with incredible views to the celebrated Flatirons. This area is flanked by bookends that can entertain civic and commercial development that are alive with activity, collaboration, and innovation.

This will be a space for everyone - a lively and distinct destination that reflects the principles laid out in the 2015 Civic Area Plan. A place where people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, and incomes feel welcome to recreate, socialize, relax, and enjoy the ambiance of a high-altitude urban center at the feet of the Rocky Mountains. The green ribbon along Boulder Creek is the unifying design that will weave metropolitan and park space into a richly diverse, sustainable, equitable, resilient, communal, recreational, artistic, historic, cultural, educational, and social gathering space that reflects Boulder's identity as a funky, fun and friendly place to live.

This project will also focus on how this vital downtown area can connect to the university on 'The Hill'. With the consolidation of city office space at the future Western City Campus, the sale, reuse, and decommissioning of buildings offers a strategic opportunity to explore synergies with the Civic Area vision. All together, these elements create a true civic heart for the Boulder community - a place to tell, enjoy, and participate in Boulder's story.

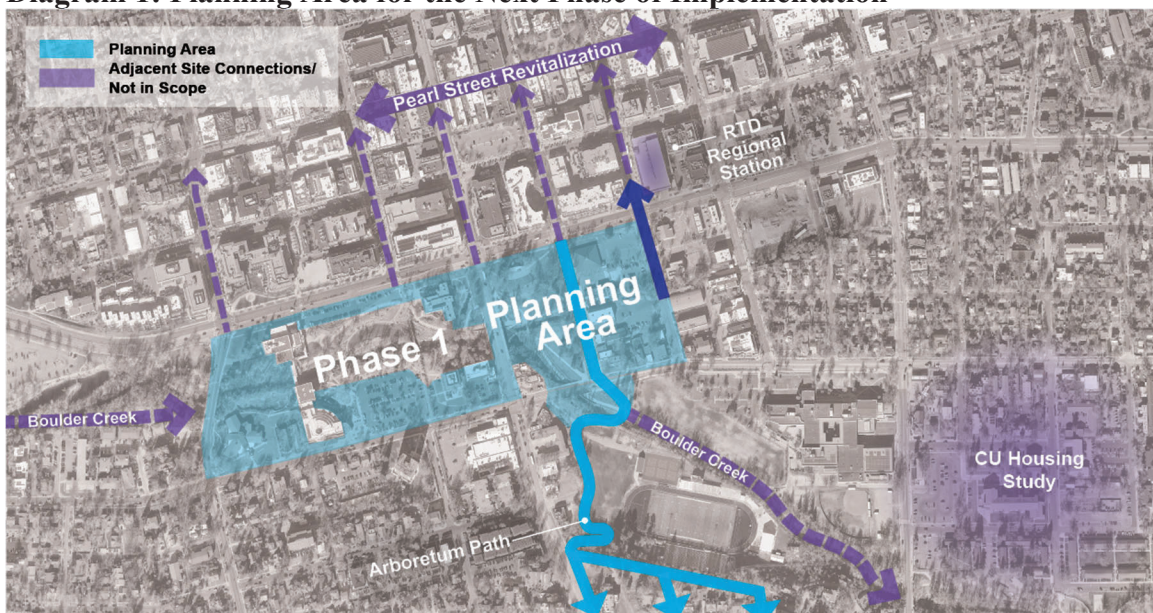
The Civic Area project continues from where the 2018 phase 1 implementation was completed (see Diagram 1, showing limit of work for phase 1 and the planning area for this next phase). Following the guidance from the approved 2015 Civic Area Plan, this next phase will continue to refine the concept plan for the Civic Area and be informed by the guiding principles as stated in the plan. As part of the study session, City Council will be asked to review these principles and note if there are any emerging topics that need to be added since the 2015 plan was completed. The principles are:

- The Civic Heart of Boulder – Creating a City Center and Unifying Public Space
- Life & Property Safety – Building a Landscape Plan for Safety and Flood Plain Education
- Outdoor Culture & Nature – Providing Connected Green Spaces, Tree Protection and Creek Revitalization

- Celebration of History & Assets – Preserving and Integrating Historical Structures and Programming
- Enhanced Access & Connections – Connecting Pedestrians, Multimodal Routes and Utilizing Parking Structures within Civic Area
- Place for Community Activity & Arts – Expanding Civic Services and Cultural, Art, Science, Educational and Entertainment Opportunities
- Sustainable & Viable Future – Creating Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability

The process for this next phase in the implementation of the Civic Area plan will include a rigorous and multi-disciplinary effort of scoping, planning, public engagement, and analysis to understand the next steps. What will emerge in this next phase is a comprehensive understanding of land use changes that are needed, redevelopment options, schematic design alternatives for park and civic spaces as well as a design to renovate the Arboretum Path connecting the Civic Area with The Hill. To achieve this, the design team will consider the overall planning area (see Diagram 1 below) and will review land use for the area within the limit of work and identify redevelopment options as well as develop schematic design options for the park area and Arboretum Path. This process will inform decision-making to clarify funding needs, provide any rezoning recommendations based on market analysis, and provide direction on which improvements will move forward into construction. The project will also include planning for improved space activation and operational function with the overall goal of adding to the vibrancy of Boulder’s downtown public spaces.

Diagram 1: Planning Area for the Next Phase of Implementation



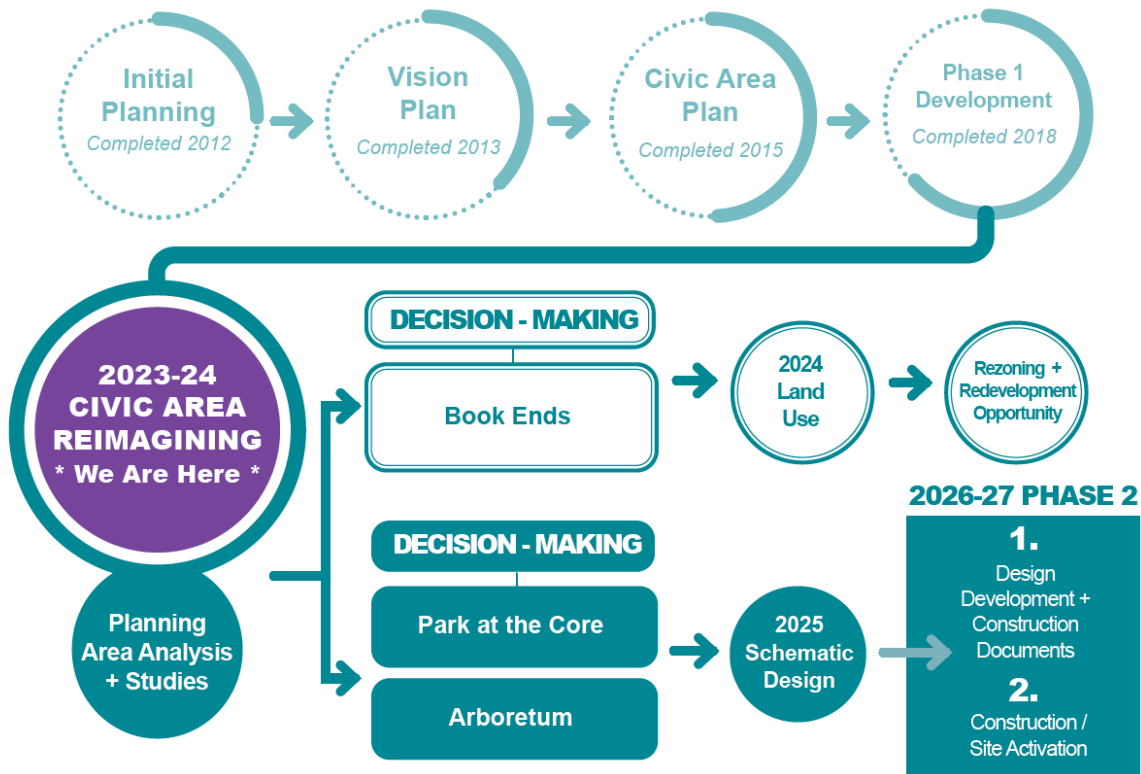
Major community stakeholders include groups such as the Downtown Boulder Partnership, Boulder Chamber of Commerce, the Boulder Public Library District, the University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder High School, Boulder Convention and Visitors’ Bureau, the Boulder Farmer’s Market, Boulder Creek Events, Out Boulder, KGNU, and more. The engagement process will include a robust and equitable approach to reach a

wide variety of site users, visitors, and community members. As outlined in the 2015 plan, the process will also seek guidance from various city boards and commissions as appropriate, including but not limited to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Planning Board, Transportation Advisory Board, Water Resources Advisory Board, Landmarks Board, and City Council (refer to Diagram 4 for the full list of board engagement).

Project Approach

The overall project approach has envisioned the heart of downtown as a revitalized space with a ‘park at the core,’ an opportunity for new urban redevelopment, and a celebration of public space to be accessible for all. Diagram 2 outlines where we are now in the process and for a more detailed description of the previous planning efforts refer to the Project History section below. The Civic Area project will kick off in 2024 with public engagement and design work for the park and Arboretum Path as well as conduct land use studies on the bookends to explore how future redevelopment can help inform the Civic Area vision. These two efforts will be a separate timeline and track, with review of land use recommendations occurring in 2024 and review of the schematic design alternatives and final design occurring in 2025.

Diagram 2: Design Process



Civic Area Project - Scope and Schedule

In 2023, city staff completed project scoping, forecasted a project timeline, and created an engagement plan to guide design. The project team also conducted a national search

for a team of consultants to work with the community and staff to deliver a visionary public space for the Civic Area.

In 2024, staff will work to complete planning analysis that will study how Phase 1 Park Improvements are currently being utilized, update any gaps in data/analysis, and identify underutilized spaces within the Civic Area. The project team will also conduct market and feasibility studies as well as land use recommendations to identify development options in the East and West Bookends of the Civic Area. This will help guide future land use decisions, explore revenue generation mechanisms for the park, and support a cohesive planning strategy within the Civic Area and Boulder Downtown.

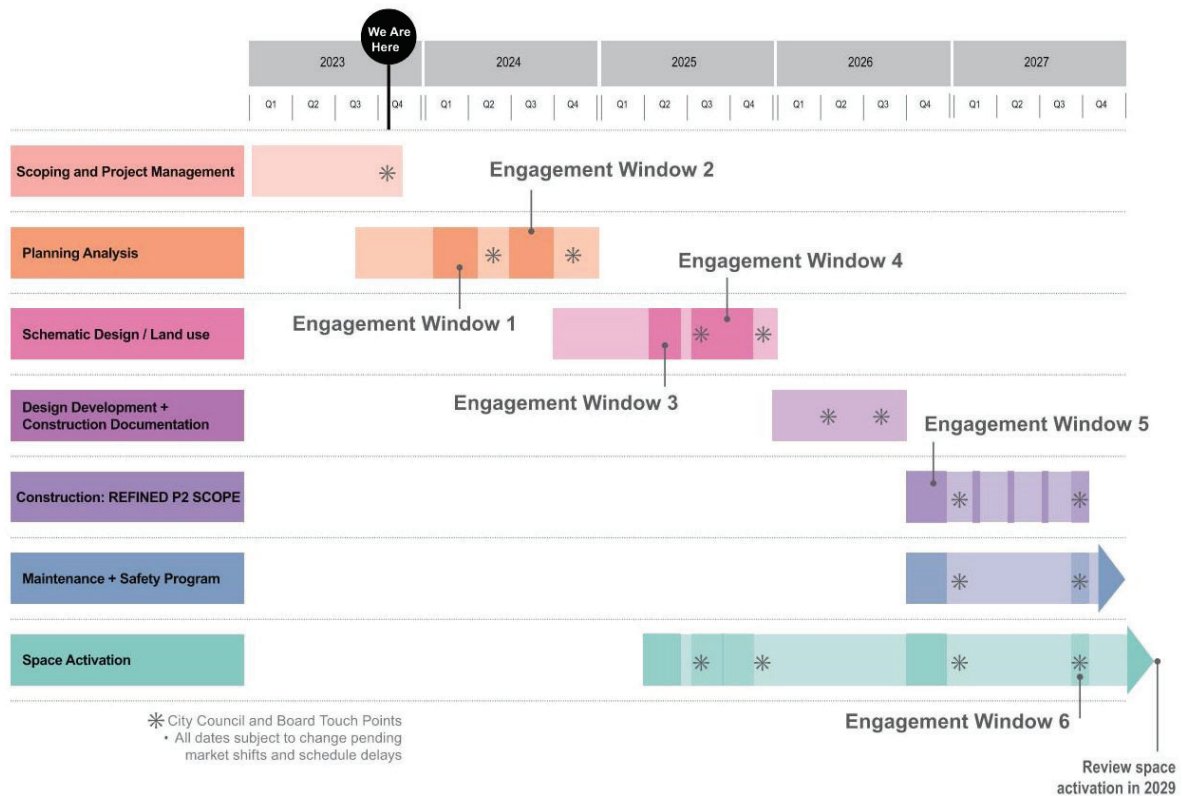
With the planning analysis and evaluation completed, the project will move forward in 2025, where the project team will pursue the next task: Schematic Design Alternatives. During this phase, the project team will dive deeper into specific spaces with more detail. Future recommendations for community, boards and Council consideration will specify materials, planting schemes, furnishings, and a more precise cost analysis. This will inform the limit of work for construction and will clarify any new phasing that will need to be considered based on more detailed design work, updated cost studies, and available funding. The following is a general outline of scope to complete throughout the process, which may adjust as the project progresses.

- **Task 1: Scope and Project Management Plan: 2023 – Completed**
 - Develop project charter and scope of work
 - Project Management Plan
 - Develop Community Engagement and Stakeholder Plan
- **Task 2: Planning Analysis: 2024**
 - Update Site Inventory
 - User Group Analysis
 - Gap/Fatal Flaw Analysis
 - Land Use Study and Recommendations
 - Flood Modeling Study
 - Market Study
 - Feasibility Study
 - Public Engagement for planning process and user group data
- **Task 3: Vision and Values: 2024**
 - Review other successful civic spaces through a precedent study
 - Space Activation Study
 - Public Engagement for programming, vision and values
- **Task 4: Schematic Design: 2025 – 2026**
 - Flood Mitigation Study
 - Climate and Human Comfort Study
 - Identify space activation, activities, events and programming
 - Develop schematic design alternatives and costs
 - Design options for park, civic and urban spaces
 - Traffic, Access and Parking Study
 - RTD Bus Relocation Study

- Building Programming
 - Pre-Application Meeting
 - Detailed costing analysis on alternatives
 - Identify coalitions, private funding opportunities and partnerships for private/public development
 - Public Engagement for design alternatives and final design
- **Task 5: Final Schematic Design:**
2025 – 2026
 - Final Schematic Design Plan
 - Final project costing analysis
 - Identification of Phase 2 Implementation will occur with city staff, Planning Board and City Council’s review
- **Task 6: Design Development and Construction Documentation for Phase 2 Limit of Work:** 2026-2027
 - Detailed design and specifications of park improvements within identified limit of work of Phase 2, as identified from Task 5
- **Task 7: Construction of Phase 2 Park Improvements:** 2027
 - Bidding and negotiations
 - Construction and administrative tasks
 - Closeout and substantial completion
- **Task 8: Maintenance Standards and Practices:** 2026 –2027
 - The intent is to examine current maintenance standards and practices and incorporate new practices as needed, based on design implementation and changing visitor use patterns. This will cover all assets covering facilities, amenities, and green assets.
- **Task 9: Space Activation:** 2026 –2030
 - Implement space activation that includes recreation (but not limited to): recreation activities, youth play-making, events, volunteering and programming.

The overall project schedule for Civic Area through phase 2 of construction for the project will be approximately four years. There are five major tasks associated with this effort (Diagram 2). Task five will move forward after a review of the final design is complete and available funding of 18m is evaluated to finalize the limit of work for construction of the Civic Area’s next phase of improvements. Tasks 6 and 7 Consider space activation and the operational aspects that will be needed once the development is complete to support the creation of a vibrant, safe and welcoming space upon project completion.

Diagram 3: Initial Project Schedule



Engagement Plan

The overall goals of the Civic Area ’s engagement will be to:

- Ensure an inclusive process so that the design team, staff and decision-makers hear from diverse voices
- Gather input to shape the urban heart of Boulder for all generations, and create universal access for all community members and visitors
- Align with the City of Boulder’s Engagement Strategic Framework (ESF) and Racial Equity Plan (REP).

Staff began raising community awareness of the next phase of design at What’s Up Boulder on Sept. 10, 2023. The core team for Civic Area also participated in the engagement efforts of [Boulder Social Streets \(BSS\)](#) from June to Sept. to ensure coordination of engagement efforts, to participate in these conversations about public spaces, and to ensure that relevant feedback would be carried over and be used to shape the Civic Area. This past summer BSS piloted a series of eight pop-up street closures on 13th Street between Arapahoe and Canyon. The key objectives were to facilitate more community connections and test programs to influence future street design. The BSS focus group has been invited to participate in the placemaking conversations for the Civic Area project.

The project's engagement plan identifies the key stakeholder groups and the main objectives and activities for the four engagement windows. The proposed engagement includes several methods of outreach including tabling, pop-ups, online questionnaires, youth activities, and collaboration with Community Connectors, among others. The engagement plan also identifies the need to develop a messaging strategy that would help guide a potential renaming effort of the Civic Area as a unified park and civic space. The project will collaborate with Growing Up Boulder for youth engagement as well as CU Boulder, Boulder High School and other local schools and educational programs within the city. The project will also collaborate with two Community Connectors to create inclusive engagement strategies and activities which will ensure the project team reaches, hears, and utilizes the voices of historically excluded communities throughout the process. During Engagement Window 1 (February to March), the design team will gather data on users of the Civic Area. They will seek to understand what the perceptions of the space are, learn how it functions for visitors, identify what space activation is missing from the park, and see what has already been successful for the community. Refer to Diagram 3 above and the following list for more information on each engagement window:

- **Window 1: Planning Analysis and Park Perceptions - February 2023**
 - This engagement window reflects Step 4 – Sharing a Foundation of Information and Inquiry in the ESF plan:
 - Inform: Sharing a Foundation of Information and Inquiry of the Park Planning Process and Initial Site Analysis
 - Consult: Park Perception of Existing Conditions
 - Consult: Park Activation and Programming Opportunities
- **Window 2: What We Heard - July 2024**
 - This engagement window reflects Step 5 – Identify Options in the ESF plan:
 - Consult: Identify Options through Confirming Community Values and Space Activation with program alternatives
- **Window 3: Schematic Design Alternatives - March 2025**
 - This engagement window reflects Step 5 and at the end of the window the team will start on Step 6 – Evaluate Options and Develop Recommendations in the ESF plan:
 - Consult: Design Option Space Activation
 - Consult: Renaming of the Civic Area
- **Window 4: Final Schematic Design - August 2025**
 - This engagement window reflects Step 7 – Make a Decision and Step 8 Communicate the Decision and Rationale in the ESF plan:
 - Inform: Make a Final Decision and Communicate the Rationale on the Final Park Design
 - Inform: Final Renaming Reveal of Civic Area

Diagram 4: Decision Making with Boards and Council Milestones

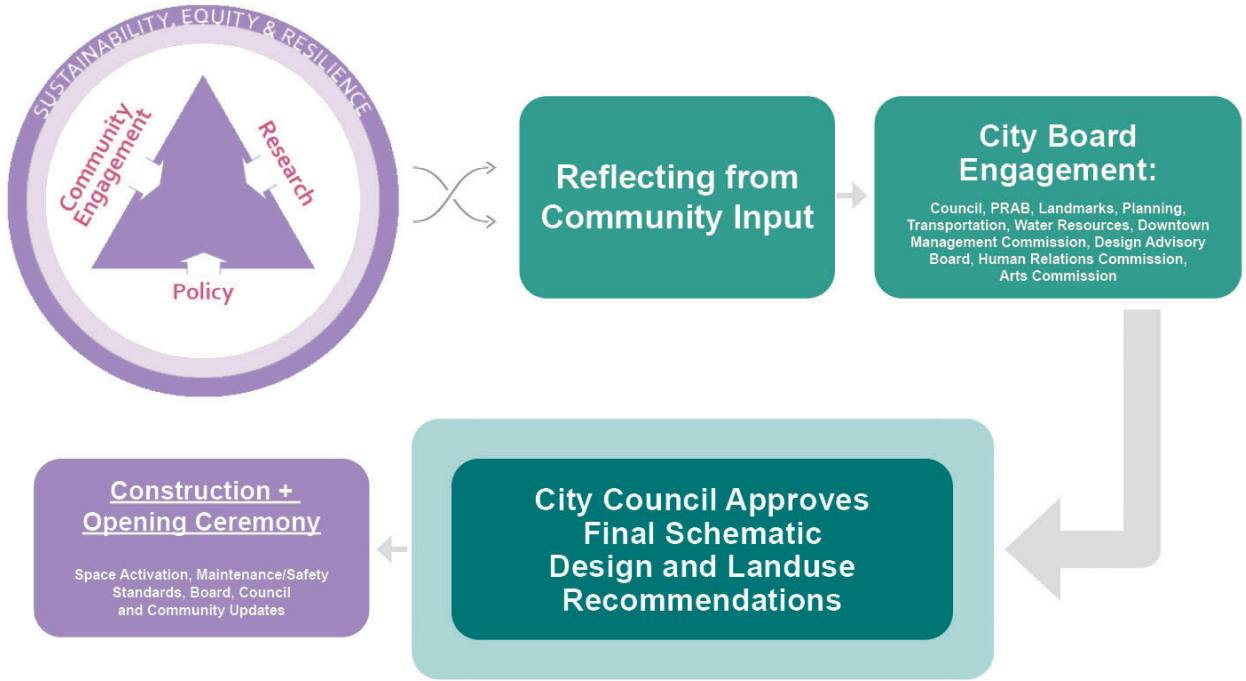
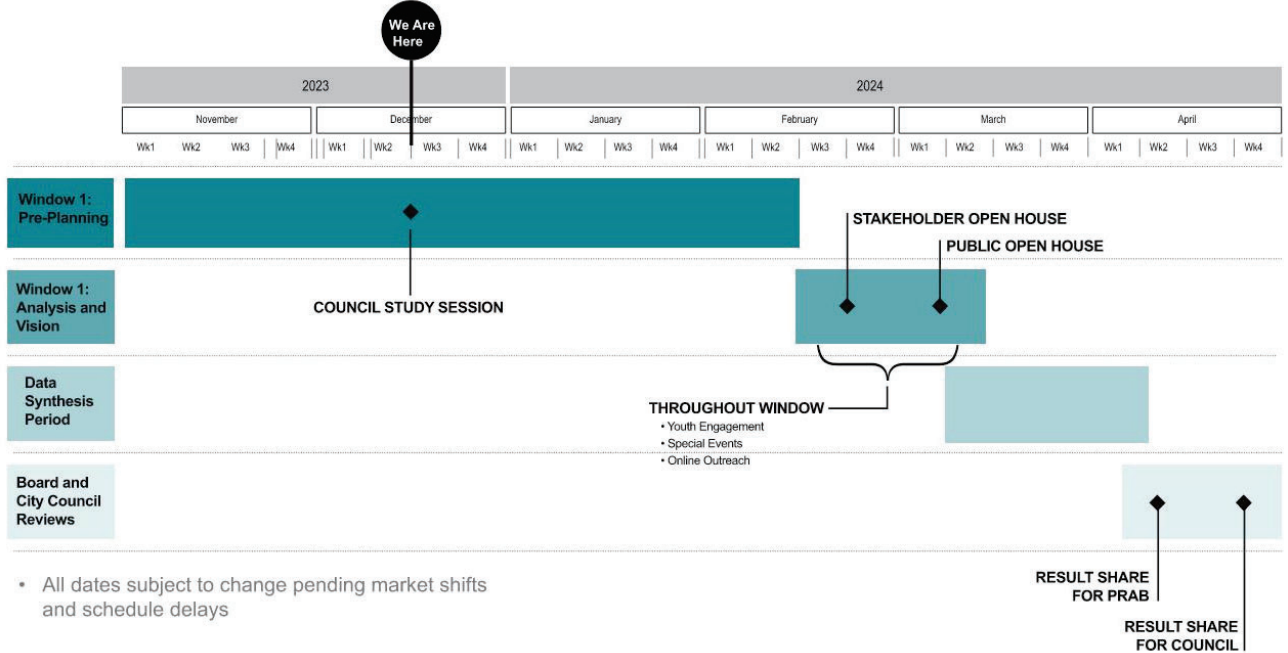


Diagram 6: Community Engagement – Outline of Window One



PROJECT HISTORY

Planning Process

This section outlines in more detail the planning history of the Civic Area. Further detail can also be referenced in the [Information Packet to Council sent in September 21, 2023](#).

The planning process for Boulder's Downtown Civic Area kicked off in 2012 with the initial Plan for Boulder's Civic Area, adopted by Council in September 2013. This document provided a high-level vision with guiding principles for Civic Park, Central Park, 13th Street, East Bookend, West Bookend, Pearl Street, the Arboretum Path and major pedestrian connections between these spaces. In 2015, City Council approved Boulder's Civic Area Plan, refining the initial thinking with an updated concept and program plan. Throughout these two key efforts, a robust public engagement, stakeholder, and steering committee process was incorporated into the overall project timeline to ensure the proposed Civic Area enhancements reflected the values and goals of the community. The outcome of the project will create a dynamic, connected, and vibrant collection of community spaces enjoyed by residents and visitors in the Civic Area, informed by the seven guiding principles from the Civic Area Plan:

- The Civic Heart of Boulder – Creating a City Center and Unifying Public Space
- Life & Property Safety – Building a Landscape Plan for Safety and Flood Plain Education
- Outdoor Culture & Nature – Providing Connected Green Spaces, Tree Protection and Creek Revitalization
- Celebration of History & Assets – Preserving and Integrating Historical Structures and Programming
- Enhanced Access & Connections – Connecting Pedestrians, Multimodal Routes and Utilizing Parking Structures within Civic Area
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Phase 1 Development: Park improvements

Following plan approval, the more detailed design commenced for Phase 1 of the Civic Area in 2015. Due to budgetary constraints, the original Phase 1 concept was broken into two phases:

- Phase 1: Area's west of Broadway. Construction was completed in 2018.
 - Design and construction for the park area east of Broadway did not move forward at the time. This area will now be incorporated into the current project.

Completed improvements in Phase 1 included:

- Improvements west of the Library and east of the Municipal Building
- New play areas south of the creek and west of the Library
- Creek cleanup and restoration from the Library to the Municipal Building
- 11th Street Spine Pedestrian Bridge

Upon completion of Phase 1, park development included the Cherry Tree Plaza, nature and water play playgrounds, an event lawn, enhanced grading for stormwater runoff,

updated bike and pedestrian trail circulation for the Boulder Creek Path, a new bridge connection to align with 11th Street, new and restored creek access nodes along the bank, and major upgrades to the lighting, furnishings, and native plantings. These improvements have promoted more engagement at the creek's edge, provided better circulation throughout Civic Park, and supported a variety of park activities, programs, and safety measures.

NEXT STEPS

Project Next Steps

- **Project Kickoff – January 2024**
Based on Council direction at the study session, staff will refine the project management and engagement plan and kickoff the Civic Area project with the contracted design team in January 2024.
- **Engagement Window 1 Opens – February / March 2024**
The project team will open engagement window 1 to share a foundation of information and knowledge and gather community input about park perceptions, existing conditions, and community desires for placemaking and activation.

City Council Next Steps

The project team will return to Council in Spring 2024 to share project progress and community feedback, and they will seek input on next steps for area planning and design. The following touch points are the initial schedule for further City Council involvement throughout the project process:

- **City Council touch point on What We Heard (confirming concept diagrams after Window 2) – September/October 2024**
- **City Council Touch Point on Schematic Design Alternatives (after window 3 engagement) – Q2 2025**
- **City Council touch point on the Final Schematic Design (after window 4 engagement) – Q4 2025**
- **City Council approval of preferred Schematic Design – Q1 2026**
 - **Note: Identification of Phase 2 Implementation at this decision-making milestone will occur with city staff, Planning Board and City Council. Construction will move forward with the \$18m in funding for the project.**

ATTACHMENTS

- A. 2015 Civic Area Illustrative Plan

2015 Civic Area Plan

