



**INFORMATION ITEM  
MEMORANDUM**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager  
Mark Woulf, Assistant City Manager  
Ryan Hanschen, Community Engagement Manager  
Mark Davison, Planning Senior Manager, BPR  
Megan (Meggs) Valliere, Assistant to City Council

Date: August 1, 2024

**Subject: Information Item: Update on June 23<sup>rd</sup> Roll-n-Stroll with Council**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Event Summary:

Focus Audience for this Council Engagement	Members of the Disability Community, Family Members, and Advocates/Allies
Date and Location	June 23 <sup>rd</sup> , 2024 Flagstaff Summit West, Sensory/Ute Accessible Trail
Council Participants	Lauren Folkerts Nicole Speer
Number of Event Participants	32
City Staff in Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Sarah Malin, Community Connector for People with Disabilities</li><li>▪ Mark Davison, Planning Senior Manager, BPR</li><li>▪ Topher Downham, Education and Outreach Program Manager, OSMP</li></ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Linsey Mach, Education and Outreach Representative, OSMP</li><li>▪ Megan Valliere, Assistant to City Council, CMO</li><li>▪ Deryn Wagner, Senior Landscape Architect, BPR</li></ul> |
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### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Nominal costs related to providing coffee and breakfast treats for participants that fit within the current budget.

### **COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS**

As Chats with Council are designed to advance meaningful and inclusive community engagement, the sustainability impacts of each event are anticipated to be positive and include fostering connection, participating in constructive dialogue with elected officials, and cultivating a deeper trust in city government.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2019, Boulder City Council committed to continue trying new approaches to engage community members who do not typically participate in council matters and formal meetings. The purpose of Chats with Council is to give a more diverse set of community members a convenient, drop-in opportunity to engage with their elected officials. These engagement opportunities are designed to promote short, two-way conversations about issues that matter most to residents and others in the city. The idea originated from council members, who are often as frustrated as community members by the lack of time to have meaningful conversations during open comment or public hearings.

Past sessions have featured one to three participating council members at each event, with no formal agenda or presentation. Community members are welcome to come by anytime during sessions and stay for as long – or as short – as they wish.

When everyone participating wants to discuss one topic, the conversations can be more in-depth. If there are a variety of topics participants wish to discuss, a staff coordinator captures the topics and seeks to make time for as many of these as possible. Some experimentation has also occurred around smaller, more focused audiences, especially when there are specific language needs, as well as rotating stations that can be particularly effective when the participant group is large. Some sessions have also featured walks that combine elements of a tour with more casual conversation.

## **ANALYSIS**

For this Chat with Council, council members were invited to join an existing Roll-n-Stroll opportunity that the city's OSMP Department hosted as part of its Nature Hikes and Programs. The June 23<sup>rd</sup> Roll-n-Stroll welcomed members of the Disability Community, their family members and friends, and community advocates and allies to enjoy the Flagstaff Summit West Sensory/Ute accessible trail. The main goal of the Roll-n-Strolls is to enable opportunities for youth with disabilities (and their parents) to access parks and nature and intentionally creating more opportunities to do this.

The event started off with brief remarks from city staff members Mark Davison and Topher Downham and a personal introduction by Sarah Malin, the city's youngest community connector focused on elevating voices of people with disabilities, as well as councilmember introductions. There were extra wheelchairs and hand bikes on site for able-bodied individuals to experience the trail using a mobility device. The hike was about 1-mile long, and the engagement lasted from about 9:45 am to 12:00 pm.

Because this Council engagement was nature- and activity-based, the themes provided below represent a high-level summary of the topics that council members and staff heard from participants, as well as some ideas and conversations that community members have shared at previous Roll-n-Strolls that give additional context to the themes and recommendations below.

### **Theme #1 – Creating Universal Access in Parks and Nature for Children with Disabilities**

With community and family support, youth experiencing disabilities can be included, independent members of our community. Creating more opportunities for children with disabilities and the parents or caregivers who support them to spend time in parks and nature through intentionally designed outdoor spaces, like inclusive natural play areas, is a critical need. With universal design, there is a path forward, and it does not have to be complicated or expensive. A recent staff article on creating more [accessible inclusive park spaces for children with disabilities](#) provides an outline to access parks and nature that hopefully will inspire the city to go beyond the current status quo into a universal world where all children are accepted, and their lives are enriched equitably:

- Think of play as an activity children do, not the thing they play with.
- Add letterboards at entrances to play areas (even if not used, they indicate that a place is welcome to children with disabilities).
- Offer large changing tables that can accommodate teens that have a privacy screen.
- Create multiple sensory elements that are both loud and subtle.

- Distribute play pods around a path (1/4 to 1 mile) to provide opportunities for both creative and collaborative play covering gross and fine motor skills.
- Incorporate nature play, rather than prefabricated equipment, which increases opportunities for universal design.
- Create quiet spaces where children can rest, observe others, and be alone.

At previous Roll-n-Stroll opportunities, community members have discussed that, beyond design, there is also a need to create a support network for youth experiencing disability, and looking at using the school model for both PARA support and IEP agreements is a way forward:

- **Include outdoor paraprofessional support:** Paraprofessionals, the professionals legally required to support children with disabilities in schools, can help with things like diaper changes, feeding, or a seizure event. What might outdoor recreation look like for children experiencing disabilities if a city staffed paraprofessionals in public parks, a play area, or a trailhead at designated times? Parents could book appointment times and arrive at the place knowing there would be a person to help care for their child's basic needs.
- **Implement Individualized Nature Programs:** By implementing the ideas above, a network of place-based activities can be created that better supports the ability of a child or youth with disabilities to access nature in a variety of forms. Lydia, one Roll-n-Stroll participant and child of staff member Mark Davison and his wife Danae, can enjoy the smells of plants in a local community garden every week, spend time with friends and family in nature at monthly Roll-n-Stroll gatherings, and a few times a year, visit wilderness trails with the help of an adaptive mobility device and volunteers. For these options to exist in all cities for all children, a coordinated effort is necessary. In public schools, every child with a disability who receives special education must have an [Individualized Education Program](#) (IEP). Similar to IEPs, the same support could be created for going into parks and nature through Individualized *Nature* Programs (INP). If cities created a Disability Equity Office, their staff could provide coordinated, universal access to parks and nature through Individualized Nature Programs for all children with disabilities.

### Theme #2 – Compliance vs. User Experience

Several community members shared that relying solely upon compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) often does not meet the evolving needs of the Disability Community.

- While the ADA has served an important purpose in making public spaces more accessible, advances in mobility device technology require governments to think more broadly about the planning and design of public spaces. It is important that trails and other public accommodations meet the needs of a variety of newer physical mobility devices that did not exist or were not widely used when the ADA was passed in the 1990s.
- Spending city dollars focusing solely on ADA compliance can result in missed opportunities to implement more affordable policies – such as ensuring community

members have the mobility devices that work best for them – that will more quickly and effectively meet community members’ daily accessibility needs.

- Each member of the Disability Community possesses unique needs. It is crucial to consider each person’s unique experiences and not to assume that a one-size-fits-all approach will impact all members of the Disability Community in the same way.

### Theme #3 – Dignity of Risk

Many participants, city staff, and council members engaged in conversations regarding the dignity of risk for individuals with disabilities. Many shared that while the current approach to ADA is often to provide completely risk-free spaces, which unfortunately often leads to boring and dull spaces for family and community members with disabilities, it is incredibly important that members of the Disability Community have access to opportunities that enable and empower physical, mental, or social adventurousness. Outdoor activities often go hand-in-hand with play, especially risky play. It is essential that children experiencing disability and their families are given the opportunity and support needed to engage in the outdoors to whatever extent they desire – whether they want to spend a few hours in a universally-designed greenspace or take an overnight camping trip on a wilderness trail. Children with disabilities should not be withheld these experiences, and should instead be afforded the “[dignity of risk](#),” as impeding this right can prevent personal growth, decrease self-esteem, and reduce the overall quality of life.

- o One example a participant provided was being able to access nature-based recreation opportunities and trails. While pavement and ADA-accessible playgrounds and facilities may provide the safest experiences for people using wheelchairs and other mobility devices, designing trails and open spaces with mobility devices in mind enables members of the Disability Community to experience nature, recreation, and adventure in similar ways to able-bodied community members.

### Theme #4 – Mental Health Support

Many community members underscored the importance of mental health support for the Disability Community.

- In addition to support for individuals with disabilities, it is crucial that caretakers also receive the mental health support that they need.
- Providing adequate, ongoing mental health support will encourage community resilience and prevent crises from which the community will later need to heal.

### Theme #5 – Importance of Community Building

Several participants remarked upon the importance of bringing together individuals with disabilities and able-bodied people; elected officials and community members; residents and visitors; youth and older adults; and all kinds of people to build community. Roll-n-Strolls provide one such opportunity for this type of community building.

- Many attendees shared appreciation for the work the city is doing not only in Parks and Recreation/OSMP, but also through outreach and engagement with Community Connectors.
- To continue to build community, it is important to make sure all city meetings (including council meetings) are designed to work better for people of all abilities. One idea included having a room nearby chambers that is open to community members and enables them to watch/listen to the meeting in a space nearby, while also providing an opportunity for coping behaviors related to sensory, physical, or mental/emotional needs.

### Theme #6 – Cross-jurisdictional Learning

Some of the Roll-n-Stroll participants were visitors in the Boulder community who currently live in Dallas, Texas. While in town, they reached out to a parents' disability support group on Facebook and were able to learn about Boulder's accessible trails and found information about the Roll-n-Stroll opportunity, which happened to take place during their visit.

- The Dallas visitors remarked that it was incredibly exciting that Boulder prioritized sharing information about trail accessibility and that opportunities like Roll-n-Strolls are available for community members.

City staff encouraged these visitors to take a copy of Boulder's [Accessible Trails Guide Booklet](#) to share with their own city staff in Dallas. Boulder staff shared that the city is always looking for opportunities to share our accessibility work and collaborate with other communities to achieve greater outcomes for members of the Disability Community nationwide. For example, City staff are working with the National League of Cities and the Children and Nature Network to share the approach Boulder is taking in creating universal access to the outdoors, especially for youth.

### NEXT STEPS

The Assistant to City Council will continue to work with staff in OSMP and Boulder Parks and Recreation to make additional Roll-n-Stroll opportunities available to council members in the fall.

These themes will be transmitted not only to the full City Council for their consideration but also to additional city staff who were not able to participate in the event but would benefit from hearing community conversations between council, staff, and members of the Disability Community.