



**CITY OF BOULDER
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: September 5, 2024

AGENDA TITLE

Consideration of a motion to cancel the September 26, 2024, Study Session and approve replacing it with the Community and Council Forum to be held that night.

PRESENTER(S)

Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager
Teresa Taylor Tate, City Attorney
Elesha Johnson, City Clerk
Sarah Huntley, Communications and Engagement Director
Ryan Hanschen, Community Engagement Manager
Megan Valliere, City Council Program Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the August 1st, 2024, regular City Council meeting, staff heard direction from Council to move forward with a proposed Community & Council Forum Pilot, with the first forum to be held on September 26th and focus on the city's Economic Development Plan and Program Enhancements. Approval of this motion will amend the council meeting calendar by cancelling the study session planned for the evening of September 26th and scheduling the Community & Council Forum in its place that same evening.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Suggested Motion Language:

Staff requests council consideration of this matter and action in the form of the following motion:

Motion to cancel the September 26, 2024, Study Session and approve replacing it with the Community and Council Forum to be held that night.

BACKGROUND

In September 2023, the city announced its partnership with the National Civic League (NCL) Center for Democracy Innovation and their “Better Public Meetings” project, with the goal of improving public meeting experiences and outcomes in local government.

Following NCL’s completion and release of Boulder’s Civic Engagement Scorecard and Civic Infrastructure Scan, the Council Subcommittee on Engagement and a Welcoming Council Environment (the Subcommittee) considered several of NCL’s recommendations for improving council and community interactions. The Subcommittee requested Council input regarding a proposed Community & Council Forum in early June. After the full Council provided feedback on the proposal, staff and the Subcommittee returned to Council with a revised proposal at the August 1st, 2024, meeting.

Council members directed staff to move forward with the proposal, with the first of two to three Community & Council Forum pilot meetings to take place on September 26th in place of that night’s planned study session. The Forum topic will be council’s priority on the city’s Economic Development Plan and Program Enhancements, and the format and implementation will include the proposed elements of the pilot project reviewed and discussed at the August 1st meeting.

ANALYSIS

Engagement Objectives

- Increase opportunities for meaningful engagement by responding to community desire to engage on council decisions sooner in the decision-making process.
- Strengthen decision-making process by hearing diverse community perspectives from individuals and organizations who have valuable and perhaps underrepresented input with council that could shape projects and outcomes.

Planned implementation elements and recommended format are included in Attachment A, the August 1st memo – Update on Community & Council Forums Pilot (formerly Community Study Sessions Pilot).

NEXT STEPS

If City Council approves this motion, staff will dedicate the time and resources necessary to implement the pilot Community & Council Forum to be hosted on September 26th.

ATTACHMENT(S)

A – August 1st memo – Update on Community & Council Forums Pilot (formerly Community Study Sessions Pilot)



**CITY OF BOULDER
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: Aug 1, 2024

AGENDA TITLE

Update on Community & Council Forums Pilot (formerly Community Study Sessions Pilot)

PRESENTER(S)

Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager
Mark Woulf, Assistant City Manager
Sarah Huntley, Communication & Engagement Director
Elesha Johnson, City Clerk
Teresa Taylor Tate, City Attorney
Ryan Hanschen, Community Engagement Manager
Meggs Valliere, Assistant to the City Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This memo shares an update from the Council Subcommittee on Engagement and a Welcoming Council Environment regarding the pilot of Community & Council Forums.

Updates reflect council feedback from the June 6th council meeting and are also informed by the National Civic League (NCL) Center for Democracy Innovation’s release of their final Boulder Civic Infrastructure Scan and Recommendations, the February 21st engagement session hosted in partnership with NCL, and the April 3rd discussion at the council retreat.

COUNCIL QUESTIONS

Should staff finalize the schedule and approach for September 26 based on this revised pilot proposal?
--

BACKGROUND

A Culture of Meaningful and Inclusive Community Engagement

The City of Boulder recognizes that local government makes better decisions and creates more responsive programs and services when the community it serves has a meaningful voice. To support this approach, the city is building a culture of meaningful engagement that is inclusive, consistent and transparent for our community.

As the city continues on our journey in strengthening our culture of engagement, as detailed in the city’s Engagement Strategic Framework, we believe that this proposal by the council subcommittee aligns with, and advances, this approach.

The National Civic League Center for Democracy Innovation’s Better Public Meetings Project

In September 2023, the city announced its partnership with the National Civic League (NCL) Center for Democracy Innovation and their “Better Public Meetings” project, with the goal of improving public meeting experiences and outcomes in local government. Boulder is one of three pilot communities that NCL chose to partner with on this effort. Boulder and NCL staff, in partnership with the Council Subcommittee on Engagement and a Welcoming Council Environment, have decided to focus the project around improving interactions between community members and council members at City Council meetings.

To start this process, the NCL team collaborated with the city to complete both a Civic Engagement Scorecard and a Civic Infrastructure Scan. The Scorecard is a quantitative rating system for community members who attend public meetings to provide feedback on their experiences at those public meetings. The Scorecard was available during all City Council meetings from 9/7/23 – 12/7/23. The Civic Infrastructure Scan consisted of qualitative interviews with community leaders about the health of public meetings.

Based on these efforts, NCL created a report of findings and recommendations, which is attached as Attachment A – “City of Boulder Civic Infrastructure Scan and Recommendations for Improving Public Meetings and Engagement in the City.” Importantly, these recommendations were drafted by the NCL and have not received endorsement from the full Council at this time.

Aligning with recommendations within this NCL Center for Democracy Innovation report, and seeking to improve council and community dialogue, the council subcommittee drafted a high-level description of a recommended pilot to include community perspectives earlier in the council decision-making process. This recommendation was included in their IP attached to the March 21st council packet as well as detailed at the council retreat on April 3rd.

This revised proposal follows the June 6th discussion and reflects council feedback including a desire for elaborated intended outcomes, more informal opportunities for discussion during the session, and the ability to ensure community members and stakeholders with relevant lived experience are prioritized within the discussion.

The following outlines revisions that include retitling as a “Community and Council Forum” to allow for small group discussion and greater stakeholder engagement outside of a more traditional study session setting.

ANALYSIS

Community & Council Forum (formerly Community Study Sessions) Pilot

Details in this update include elaborated outcomes and measurements, revised participation design, strengthened pilot title, and updated session agenda.

- Engagement Objectives:
 - Increase opportunities for meaningful engagement by responding to community desire to engage on council decisions sooner in the decision-making process.
 - Strengthen decision-making process by hearing diverse community perspectives from individuals and organizations who have valuable and perhaps underrepresented input with council that could shape projects and outcomes.

- Outcomes and Measurements

Objective	Outcome	Measurement
Increase opportunities for meaningful engagement by responding to community desire to engage on council decisions sooner in the decision-making process.	Community perspective is included sooner in city and council decision-making processes.	Timeline of engagement in decision-making process
	Individuals who participate have a positive experience during the Community & Council Forum.	Increase in % of “good” responses to “How would you rate your experience at this session?” prompt on community post-session eval (previously 48% “good” responses on CE Scorecard)
	Participants report that session design and facilitation were effective.	Positive responses on community post-session eval to: “This session was designed and facilitated in a way that allowed me to share my perspective and input.”
	Community understands how their input will be used as the project continues.	Positive responses on community post-session eval to: “City staff and/or council members explained how community input would be used.”
Strengthen decision-making process by hearing diverse community perspectives from individuals and organizations who share valuable and perhaps underrepresented input with council that could shape projects and outcomes.	Council hears community perspectives they haven’t heard before, or infrequently hears.	Positive response on council post-session eval
	Community input influences process (e.g., additional research, community engagement, options).	Positive response on council and staff post-process eval
	Community & Council Forums increase diversity of community participants.	Increase in % of participant responses to “It had diverse participation” within “what was good about this meeting” prompt on CE Scorecard (as compared to baseline of 34%):

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provided a chance for people to be heard o Maintained appropriate civic dialogue o Info about the meeting was easy to find o The meeting was accessible o It had diverse participation o The meeting was efficiently run
	<p>Council and community observed respect for different experiences and perspectives.</p>	<p>Positive responses on participant post-session eval to: “City staff and facilitators made an effort to invite everyone to participate and were respectful of different experiences and perspectives.”</p>

- Measurement Instruments
 - o Post-session Evaluation (including some BPM Civic Engagement Scorecard prompts) for council, participants, and staff at conclusion of Community & Council Forum.
 - o Post-process Evaluation for council, participants, and staff after council decision-making point within a specific process.

- Implementation Elements:
 - o Pilot one Community & Council Forum in 2024, planned for September 26, as well as one or two additional Forums in 2025.
 - o Focus Forums on only one topic and align with dates and topics within quarterly council meeting scheduling exercises. Ideal topics for Forums will be:
 - Very early in council decision-making process;
 - Hold a high level of community interest; and
 - Accessible content for general public.
 - o The initial Forum will explore the topic and council priority of the creation of an Economic Development Plan.
 - This topic meets the above criteria, highlights a council priority, and was tentatively scheduled for a fall study session.
 - Additionally, the topic is conducive to both soliciting wide community interest and community organizational partner participation in the economic vitality area.

- The study session currently scheduled for September 26, 2024 will be canceled. The Community & Council Forum will then take place at the same date and time as the previously scheduled study session, and held at the Penfield Tate Municipal Building.
- Held in-person in Council Chambers, with council and public recommended to be in-person. Community observation would be available in-person and virtually.
- Seating arranged to include tables, on the same physical level, for council, staff, and community participants.
- Councilmembers Benjamin or Winer, as engagement subcommittee members, could chair and facilitate Forums. NCL Center for Democracy Innovation partners may be available to support facilitation for an initial session.
- Community participation limited to questions/comments on the topic of the Forum (this is not Open Comment).
- Community & Council Forums will include 20 community participants – 10 invited participants with lived experience related to the topic and 10 self-identified participants selected via online sign-up and random lottery.
- Proposed Community Participant Criteria:

Participant Category	Criteria
Invited participants (10 seats) with lived experience related to the topic and/or representatives of organizational partners that represent individuals with lived experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community members with lived experience on a specific topic ○ Community members that council has not heard from, or hears from less frequently ○ Mix of backgrounds and identities within this category ○ Identified by city staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organizations with subject matter expertise or who serve community members with lived experience on a specific topic ○ Organizations that council has not heard from, or hears from less frequently ○ Mix of type of organizations within this category (e.g., direct service, academic, association) ○ Recommended by council subcommittee, identified by city staff

<p>Open Community participants (10 seats, selected by random lottery if there is more interest than seats)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Open to any self-identified community member via online sign-up o Participants randomly selected
--	---

- Recommended Format (180 minutes)
 - o Welcome, announcements, and overview of forum agenda and process (5 min)
 - o Staff presentation of topic, including executive summary, goals, context, key issues, and the “why” of a particular decision or opportunity (30 min)
 - o Clarifying questions from council and community participants (25 min)
 - o Small group discussions in breakout rooms, in five groups facilitated by a councilmember, with council and community participants as well as staff notetakers (60 min)
 - Community participants, who will be invited to answer from the following menu of specific prompts (these will have been shared with them in advance):
 - Do you have a lived experience that you want staff and council to consider when developing policy around this topic?
 - What factors do you believe will be most important in making a decision about this topic?
 - Do you have a recommendation on community groups or organizations to be engaged during this decision-making process?
 - o Small groups report out on discussion themes – captured in minutes (25 min)
 - o Council and community participants share clarifying questions and recap (30 min)
 - o Closing (5 min)
 - Facilitating council member shares a brief summary of what council learned and heard from community participants as well as next steps for this topic.

- Rationale:
 - o Currently, some community members are getting involved late in a public process (e.g., at a public hearing comment after policy options and alternatives have already been analyzed and presented by staff). This leads to some community members experiencing frustration about the timing of their input – later in a decision-making process – and leaves them with the

impression that their input has less of an influence on the ultimate decision.

- Allowing public comment and question and answer opportunities during this forum allows community members to learn alongside Councilmembers as public policy conversations are beginning, rather than when Council is being presented with final options for moving forward on an issue or topic.

NEXT STEPS

Staff are continuing coordination for an initial Community & Council Forum on September 26, 2024.

ATTACHMENTS

A – Final report of National Civic League Center for Democracy Innovation’s “City of Boulder Civic Infrastructure Scan and Recommendations for Improving Public Meetings and Engagement in the City”