



**CITY OF BOULDER
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

MEETING DATE: April 17, 2025

AGENDA TITLE

Civic Area Planning Analysis and Emerging Design Priorities

PRESENTERS

Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager
Alison Rhodes, Director of Parks and Recreation
Brad Mueller, Director of Planning and Development Services
Valerie Watson, Interim Director of Transportation and Mobility
Joanna Crean, Director of Facilities and Fleet
Cris Jones, Director of Community Vitality
Joe Taddeucci, Director of Utilities
Mark Davison, Planning Senior Manager, Parks and Recreation
Shihomi Kuriyagawa, Senior Landscape Architect, Civic Area Project Manager
Emily Urquhart, Landscape Architect
Kristofer Johnson, Comprehensive Planning Senior Manager

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intent of this memo is to update City Council on the [Civic Area Phase 2 project](#). The update for the planning analysis phase includes 1) site analysis findings, 2) East Bookend redevelopment analysis 3) Engagement Window 2 summary, and 4) emerging design priorities informed by the site analysis and community input from the two engagement windows to-date. The project team will inform on these updates and will take questions and feedback from City Council on the four topics noted above. The project team will incorporate this feedback as they move into the next stage of the design process and will return to council in the fall of 2025 with a concept plan for review. After the concept plan has been reviewed and priced, specific aspects will move into schematic design and construction based on feasibility and available funding. Schematic design will be presented to council at the end of 2025.

QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL

1. Does council have feedback on the planning analysis and redevelopment process for the East Bookend?
2. Does council have feedback on the emerging design priorities for the Civic Area?

FISCAL IMPACT

Cities all over the country recognize their downtown spaces as core economic engines that are key in unifying communities, building memorable destinations for tourism and creating opportunities for robust local economies to thrive. Revitalizing the Civic Area, a prominent space in Boulder's downtown center, will be no different. Investment in the Civic Area can reinvigorate the space, affirming it as the heart of Boulder for major events and festivities. Increased activity will attract more visitors, adding to the local revenue generation, and breathe new life into this major urban center that will support retail and, with its natural setting, improve community health. Currently, in the adopted 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Plan, there is \$18 million in funding from the Community Culture, Safety and Resilience tax for the design and construction of Civic Area Phase 2. The initial steps through the design tasks have identified the site program and associated costs for these improvements to the civic spaces, public aspects of the East Bookend (block located within 13th Street, 14th Street, Arapahoe, and Canyon) and the Arboretum Path. The \$18 million will only cover a portion of the overall Civic Area concept design, and so priorities will have to be identified on how to allocate the funding for phase 2. With this in mind, the project team will develop a concept plan that will be used to inform what elements of the site program move into schematic design, based on community input, feasibility and costs. Once the funding is prioritized and allocated for phase 2, the project boundary will be delineated for only the elements that can move into construction and implementation.

The concept plan will represent a long-term vision for the Civic Area with clearly identified design and programs for the space as a whole. Areas of the concept plan outside the priorities for Phase 2 will become part of a phase 3 effort, for which funding has yet to be identified.

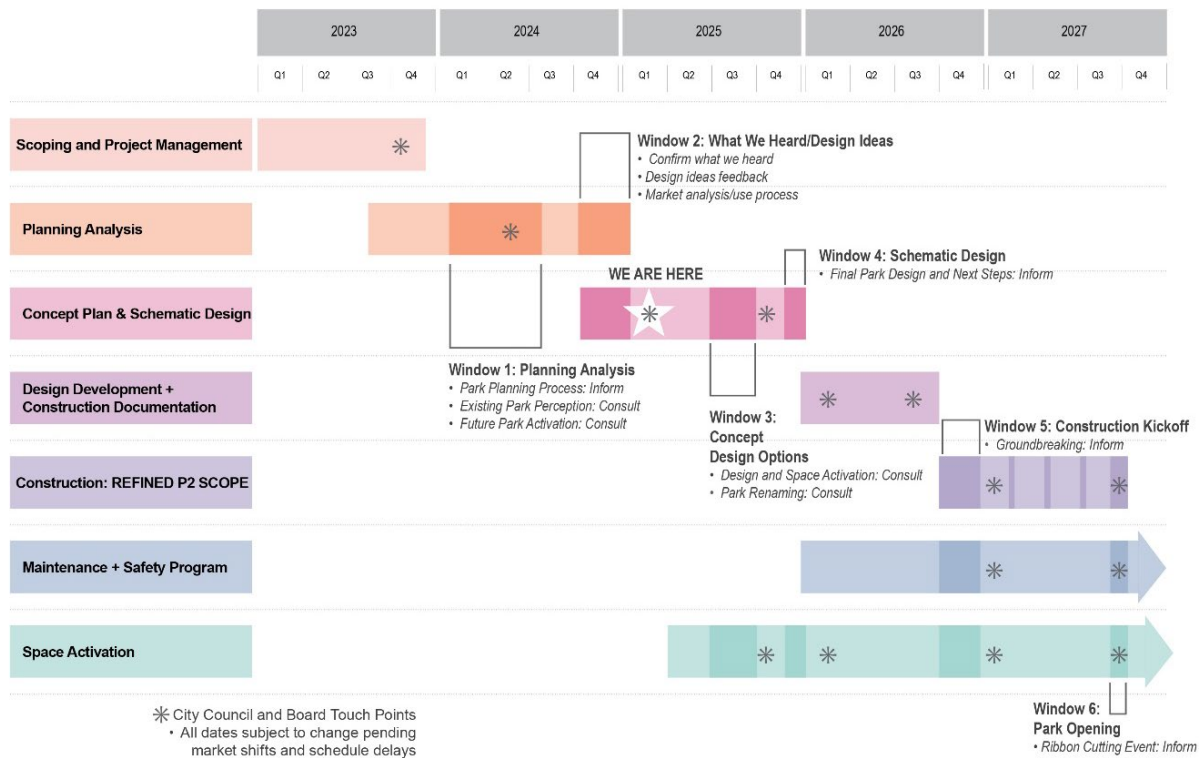
BACKGROUND

In 2023, the project team launched the scoping task for the Civic Area Phase 2 project, including updating City Council in December on the overall project process, scope and goals at [the December 14, 2023 study session](#). In 2024, the project team moved through the planning analysis phase which included research of the existing conditions, gathering technical data, and engaging the community in imagining the future of the Civic Area. The community input was sought through two windows of engagement. The first window asked community members to dream big for the Civic Area and a summary of the findings can be found here in [the August 23, 2024 council IP](#).

The team has now finished evaluating community input from the second window of engagement (held last October to December 2024); findings from the technical site analysis; and findings from the East Bookend redevelopment analysis. This marks the completion of the planning analysis task, informing the initial design ideas for the Civic Area, East Bookend, and the Arboretum Path. In evaluating the design ideas, a sense of what to prioritize has emerged, based on community wishes alongside site constraints and feasibility. These findings are outlined below and will be shared with council at the April 17th

meeting. More project information can be found on the [Civic Area Phase 2 website](#) and the full project process and schedule is detailed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Civic Area Phase 2 Project Process and Schedule



PLANNING ANALYSIS REPORT FINDINGS

The planning analysis phase was conducted over the course of 2024, including extensive inventory of existing conditions, an evaluation of feedback from phase 1 of Civic Area improvements, and guidance from existing city policies that inform decision-making, especially with regards to the East Bookend.

The following is a summary of the planning analysis work. The full Site Analysis Document can be found in Attachment A.

Site Analysis

Through the planning analysis process, the project team examined: the history and cultural stories of the site, the existing transportation network and gaps in accessibility, current programming and desired needs from the event spaces as well as an environmental inventory and study of the natural resources in the space. The major planning constraints and opportunities that emerged from this analysis include, but are not limited to:

- Improving the fragmented appearance of the Civic Area with a distinct and cohesive identity and upgrading wayfinding to be user friendly
- Improving universal access and multimodal connections into and within the Civic Area

- Exploring how to conserve existing natural features along the creek and meet the community's desire for a greater connection to the creek and its recreation opportunities
- Evaluating program options that can preserve the character of and enliven uses of the historic buildings while telling all stories of the Civic Area. With historic preservation, there are currently five individual landmarks within the project boundary, and changes within the landmark boundaries will be reviewed for consistency with the General Design Guidelines. Non-designated buildings over 50 years old will be evaluated for their historic, architectural and environmental significance.
- Managing the floodplain while supporting future development, park programming and uses. The project team is exploring examples of other cities that are creating opportunities through innovative design to provide vibrant public spaces within floodplains. These ideas will be incorporated into the design for the Civic Area. Diagrams of the High Hazard Zone and 100 Year Floodplain can be found in Attachment A. Floodplain analysis included but was not limited to:
 - High Hazard Zone (HHZ): Considered the most significant risk to life and property and thus has major development constraints. In the HHZ, no new structures or additions intended for human occupancy are allowed, and only non-substantial improvements (below 50% of the value of the building) to existing buildings are permitted. A building that is touched by the HHZ is regulated as if the entire structure is in the HHZ.
 - 100 Year Floodplain: Building permits are required to conform to flood protection standards that require the lowest floor of any building to be at least two feet above the 100-year water surface elevation. Significant additions and remodels (greater than 50% of the size or assessed value of the building) generally require that the entire structure meet flood regulations. New parking lots are not permitted where flood depths would exceed 18 inches.

Key Guiding Policies

Several existing vision plans, design guidelines and future development improvements overlap with the Civic Area Phase 2 scope. These guiding plans and policies will be woven into the overall design to create a cohesive downtown space that reflects Boulder's larger goals for the built environment:

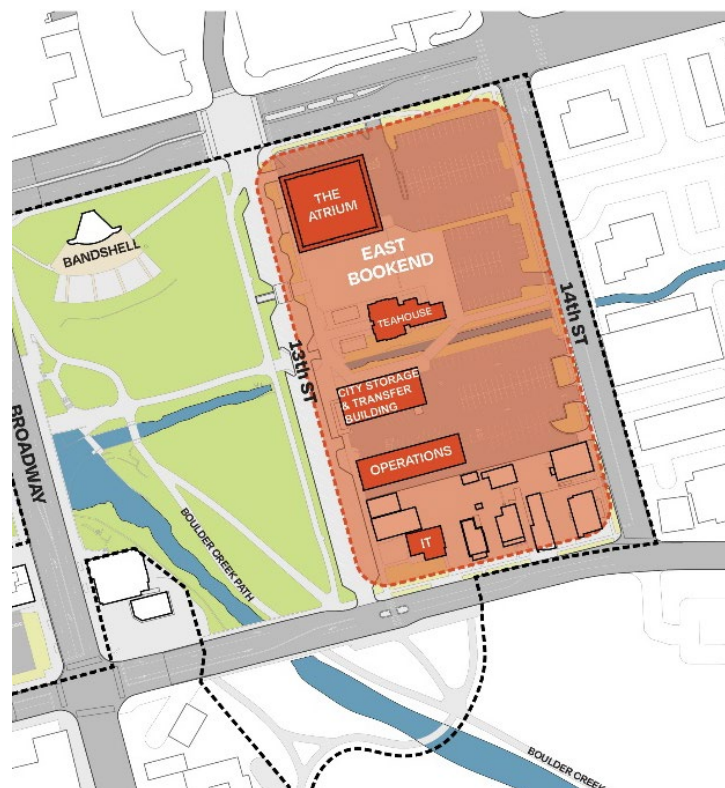
- [The 2015 Civic Area Plan](#) outlines Seven Guiding Principles: Civic Heart of Boulder, Life Property and Safety, Outdoor Recreation, Celebration of History and Assets, Enhanced Access and Connections, Place for Community Activities and Arts and Sustainable and Viable Future.
- City Council provided additional guidance at the [Study Session on December 14, 2023](#) to align with the outcomes of the [Sustainability, Equity and Resilience \(SER\) framework](#). Council also asked the project team to demonstrate how guiding plans and policies will inform the project as it moves towards a final design to ensure accountability of the city's vision, values, and goals. Attachment A includes evaluation of existing plans, policies and design guidelines and their relevance to this project. The project will use this evaluation to ensure the design of the Civic Area seamlessly integrates into the complexities that make up the downtown space.
- Another key request council made was to specifically prioritize multimodal and universal access to and through the Civic Area for pedestrians, cyclists and people experiencing disabilities and to create a multimodal environment that is welcoming, accessible, safe, and

community-oriented. The project team has completed a Transportation and Mobility Analysis, and next steps will incorporate recommendations into the emerging design while coordinating with the Transportation and Mobility Department, along with all the programming, environmental, facility, amenity, and other analyses that have been conducted.

EAST BOOKEND REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS

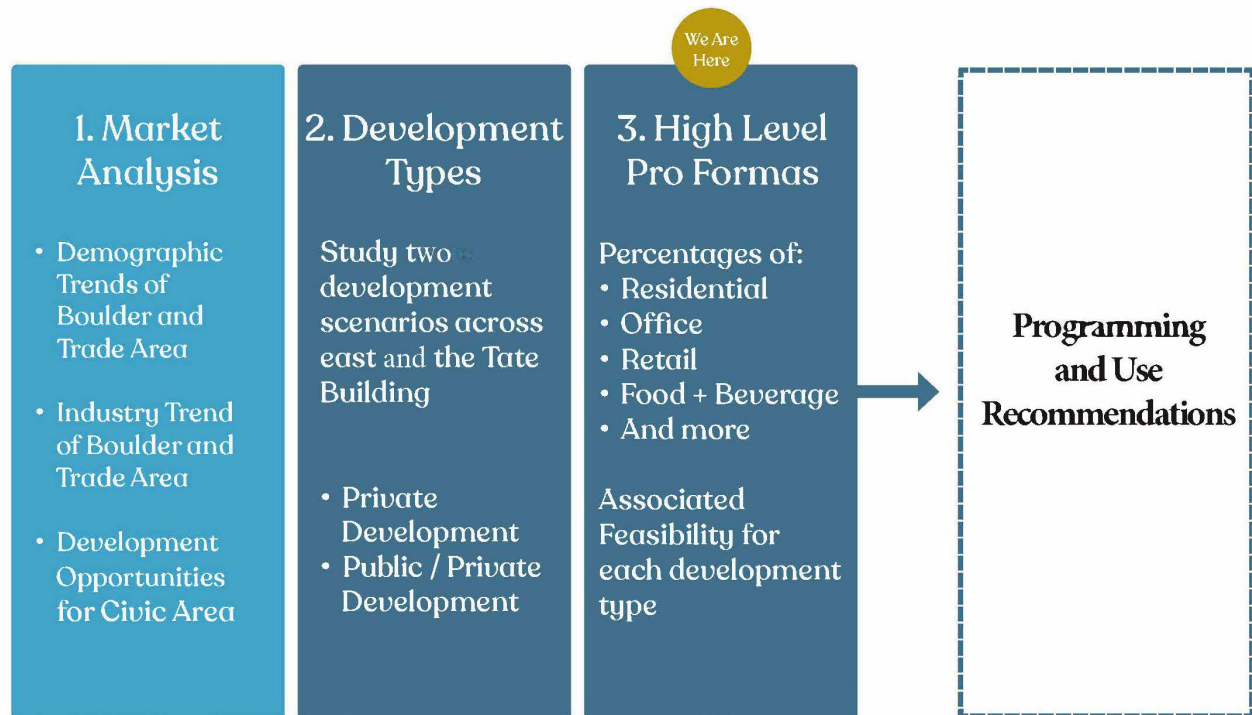
As part of the planning analysis phase, a Programming and Use Study was conducted to examine East Bookend's future development opportunities within Civic Area. The major goal of the project team is to balance community benefit along with public, nonprofit, and private sector goals. The scope of the East Bookend is shown in Figure 2. The highlighted area is the boundary of the East Bookend, and the dark red buildings denote city-owned buildings while buildings shown in light red are privately owned.

Figure 2: Scope of the East Bookend - Programming and Use Study



The East Bookend study included a market analysis of development types and the potential to reprogram city-owned existing buildings. It also reviewed parking and identified public spaces as part of creating an integrated Civic Area. The goal was to assess whether any market shifts in development opportunities, feasibility parameters or community desires had changed since the 2015 Civic Area Plan was created a decade ago. Figure 3 outlines the process the project team is undertaking to examine appropriate programming and use types at the East Bookend in the Civic Area, and Attachment B includes the full summary of the analysis.

Figure 3: Program and Use Study Process



The project team completed an analysis of current and future market and economic trends for different land uses and real estate product types. This study provided a baseline for planning, programming, and the types of partnerships the city may enter into for the East Bookend. The study outlines trends and movements of the greater Boulder population regionally, including who is moving into the city as well as the desired activities and housing types these groups are looking for. For example, the market analysis found that of the population moving into downtown Boulder, several of these groups were most likely looking for multi-unit housing types and interested in the 'foodie' scene and cultural events.

From this evaluation, development types were identified in the market analysis based on population, economic, and market trends, including data from broader nation-wide shifts and local trends of the Boulder County region. The development types were reviewed against the existing and approved future development stock across the city, and evaluated against other front range communities including Longmont, Louisville, Lafayette, and Arvada.

After collecting this information, the development types were analyzed to see where they could be successful in the Civic Area's East Bookend. Figure 4 outlines the key viable development types the East Bookend could support: residential, food and beverage, retail and local employment. When compared with the original goals of the 2015 Civic Area Plan, many of the suggested development types remain the same, with a few additions, specifically in the residential market sector.

Figure 4: Development Types



Residential

1. Single Family Attached Units*
2. Rental Apartments targeted to “middle income” or workforce renters*
3. Mixed-Income Rental Apartments (market-rate and affordable)*



Retail

1. Specialty Food
2. Restaurant/Bar
3. Food Service/Food Trucks



Employment

1. Neighborhood/Local Service Space *
2. Live/Work “Maker” Space *
3. Performing Arts/Support Spaces

** New programming types identified outside of the 2015 Civic Area Plan*

From the development types above, and taking from the overall vision for the Civic Area, four high level themes for the East Bookend emerged:

- Community Residential
- Food and Beverage
- Arts and Culture
- Health and Recreation

These four themes, either on their own or in combination, create an identity for the East Bookend that supports civic use and creates a more attractive downtown for the community. The themes also lay a foundation for next steps in seeking development partnerships with either private entities or nonprofits. The purpose is to create a strong vision for redevelopment in this vital area at the heart of Boulder.

The project team is now exploring high level pro formas: financial models that illustrate what the financial position would look like if specific development scenarios were built. This evaluation includes the cost of development and operations in relation to the potential revenue generated.

Figure 5 shows three example high-level pro formas of different development scenarios for East Bookend. Each of the three diagrams evaluates a different combination of East Bookend development including mixed-use residential, retail (in food and beverage), public park space, and cultural buildings (such as art galleries or a cultural center).

Figure 5: Example of Development Types with High Level Pro Forma Studies at East Bookend



Next steps would be to invite private sector and nonprofit groups to collaborate closely on potential development opportunities with the city through a Request For Interest (RFI) process, seeking groups interested in collaborating on the revitalization of East Bookend. This would help advance redevelopment of the East Bookend by:

- Identifying potential partners in the private development sector and interested nonprofits to collaborate on development
- Confirming the identified development types with members of the private sector, and create a strategic plan for private development implementation and nonprofit partnerships with the city
- Identifying any other development types and partnerships not accounted for in the process through conversations with interested parties
- Marketing the East Bookend themes to a broader audience and gaining regional and national attention for development opportunities

Overall, this process can help to market the East Bookend to attract a visionary developer ready to forge a strong alliance with the city and reimagine a brighter future for the downtown Civic Area. The partnership can leverage the Farmers Market and create an expanded public space where local food, events and community activities take center stage.

One recent example of this type of redevelopment is [The Railyard](#) in Sante Fe, New Mexico. This redevelopment reworked the historic grounds of the railyards, creating an integrated plan that sought to “transform the historic Railyard into a sustainable and inviting public space for recreational, social, artistic, and commercial activities in a way that embraces Santa Fe’s cultural and historical significance and upholds the community’s vision.” With year-round structures for the Santa Fe Farmers Market and investment in space activation through programs, events, and easy booking of spaces, Railyards is now thriving. It demonstrates how vision can become reality to reinvent a key space downtown.

Cities all over the nation look to reinvigorate their core downtown spaces, knowing these spaces contribute to their economies in a big way, and Boulder is no different. Creating a bustling city center with vibrant communities, local economies and pristine urban outdoor spaces is the path forward to a successful Boulder community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WINDOW 2 FINDINGS

From October to December 2024, the project team conducted the second engagement window to confirm [“What We Heard” in the first window](#) and gain feedback on preliminary design ideas for the Civic Area. Per council direction and existing policy, the project team prioritized equitable and transparent engagement to ensure all community members could participate and feel heard throughout this process.

Equity in Engagement

Plans for the second engagement window utilized the Racial Equity Instrument to better understand the project team’s reach and whether the project was ensuring participation of historically excluded groups. All engagement material was available in English and Spanish, and Spanish-speaking staff and Community Connectors were involved every step of the way. In this second window, outreach included:

- Two project Community Connectors who helped co-create engagement
 - Designing an equity-focused engagement process
 - Promoting engagement events to historically excluded communities
 - Evaluating public feedback and confirming representation of historically excluded communities in the emerging design
- Engagement opportunities at locations with diverse participation
 - Pop-up stations showing the two design sketches were placed at the Main Library, NoBo Library, and the three recreation centers in Boulder
 - These were left up for three weeks with options to write in answers or vote virtually
 - Results showed ample feedback from youth and other historically excluded groups including responses in Spanish
- Community Connectors in Residence feedback sessions
 - Equity Instrument review: gaining insight on how to reach a wider audience
 - Spreading the word for engagement opportunities to historically excluded groups
 - Civic Area site walk and feedback session
 - Review of design ideas (first session)
 - Review of design ideas (second session)
- Uplifting youth voices through on-going engagement in Spring 2025
 - Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is facilitating multiple sessions and on-site field trips with Boulder Day Nursery, Whittier Elementary School and Boulder High School (BHS)
 - At BHS, GUB worked with multiple classes and the Zonta club to gather specific feedback on what teens most want to see in the park

Design Feedback and Themes

Two concept diagrams were created in response to design ideas heard from the public during previous engagement. During this engagement window, community members voted for their favorite diagram, Creekside Social or Adventure Loop, shown in Figures 6 and 7, as well as their favorite amenities in each.

This engagement activity informed prioritization for deciding which improvements to bring forward into the concept design phase and pursue within the project budget.

The Creekside Social diagram illustrates a park that prioritizes flexible, welcoming social spaces to foster community connection and passive opportunities to engage with nature. The Adventure Loop diagram focuses on community requests for active recreation, nature immersion, and unique experiences, creating a more intensely developed and programmed park approach. The [project website](#) includes images of the below design diagrams in more detail.

Figure 6: Creekside Social diagram

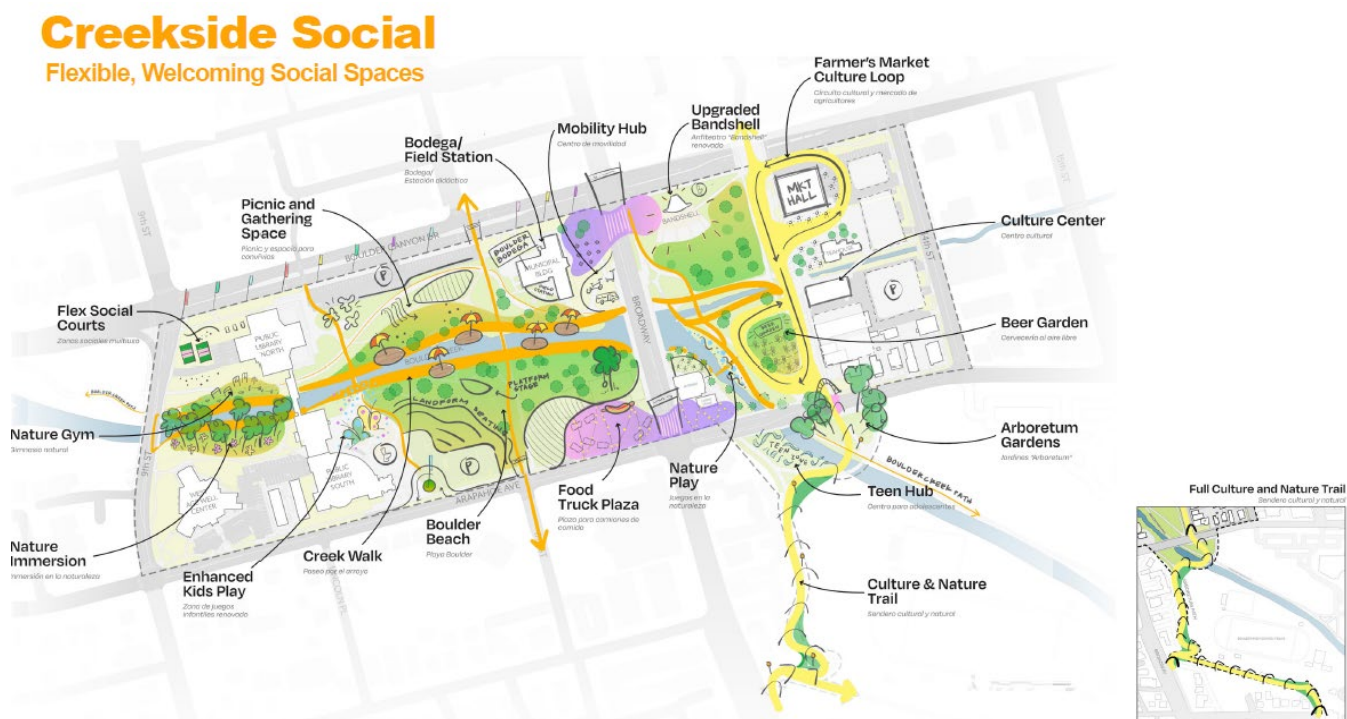


Figure 7: Adventure Loop Diagram

Adventure Loop

Outdoor Rooms for Recreation and Relaxation



The community also had a chance to submit open-ended comments in response to the Creekside Social and Adventure Loop diagrams. Figure 8 shows the top themes, ranked in descending order, that emerged from these comments. Unsocial behaviors and safety were the top themes shared by all community members and by historically excluded groups. These themes were further organized into four categories in which community members wanted to see change occur: placemaking (spatial design), social behaviors (safety, rules and regulations), space activation (programming desires) and operations and maintenance (taking care of what we have).

Figure 8: Emerging Themes from Open Ended Comments



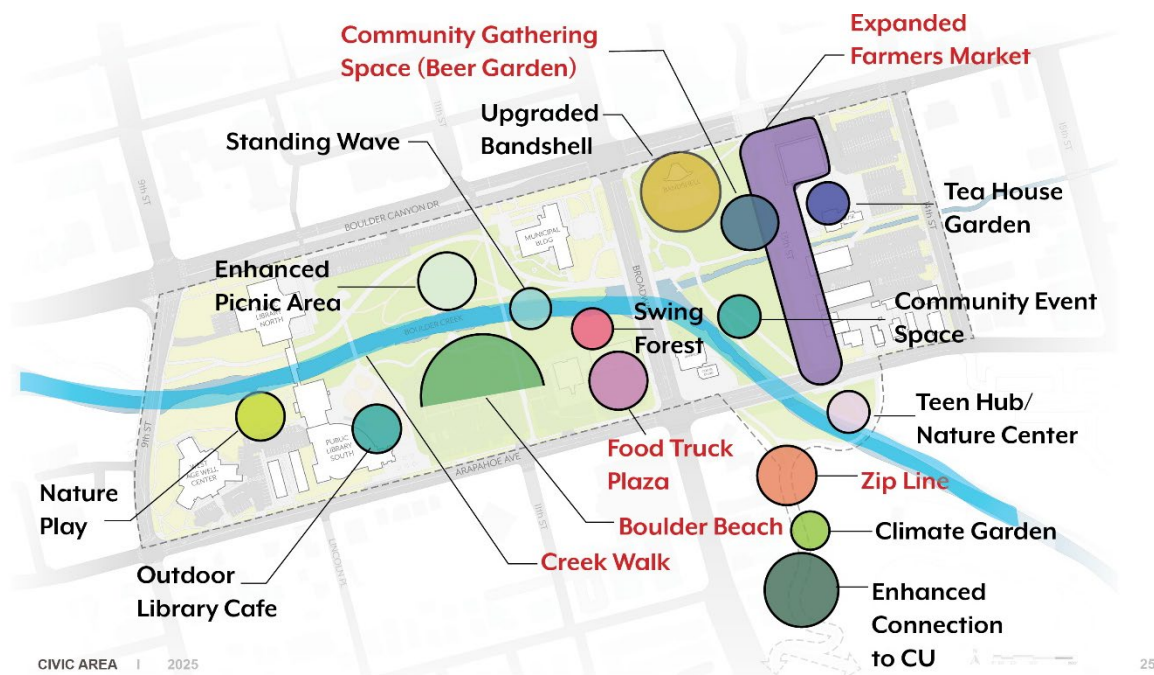
MAJOR PRIORITIES ADVANCING INTO THE DESIGN PHASE

Design ideas have emerged with key civic amenities and space activation ideas being identified by the community and then evaluated alongside feasibility and existing policy guidance. The project team identified the most popular amenities that emerged from community input in engagement windows 1 and 2:

- Expanded, year-round Farmers Market
- Community gathering areas such as a Beer Garden, Teen Hub and Nature Center
- Boulder Beach to create a vibrant gathering area that is safe, fun, and connected to nature
- Food Truck Plaza to support events and space activation
- Creek Walk that creates better access to the creek and preserves the natural feel
- Zipline along the Arboretum Path

Figure 6 below shows a more extensive list of the most popular features from both diagrams, with the top six most popular highlighted in red. The diagram shows general ideas; their scale and location are conceptual only.

Figure 6: Most Popular Features from Engagement Window 2 Diagrams



Additionally, by partnering with Growing Up Boulder (GUB) and working with Boulder High School students, the idea of creating a ‘third space’ for teens emerged as a top priority. Students identified a need for a safe, flexible, and affordable space such as a teen-run café where they can connect and relax after school.

GUB is also working on engagement with elementary students and preschoolers to gather insight on designing a park where youth can explore the natural environment, learn, and be creative. A nature center or field station—an outdoor recreation and learning hub designed for all-ages programming—is one popular idea that could serve this purpose.

Parallel to the design process, the project team is also developing a Park Management Plan to ensure that once the renovations are complete and ribbon cutting occurs, partnerships are in place for space activation, operations and enforcement of rules. The summary below highlights how the emerging design will be supported by several parallel processes to ensure success for the Civic Area Phase 2 project:

- Connecting to Nature Engagement Series:** In the spring of this year, the Día del Niño (Children’s Day) event will launch the city’s Connecting to Nature engagement series, set to extend throughout the summer with kids concerts, picnics, and a pop-up nature play in Central Park. The launch event will have an interactive, community-built mural guided by a local artist. This will start the effort to form identity and storytelling in Civic Area and the nature play engagement series will act not only as the third window of engagement but help activate the space throughout the summer.
- Space Activation Collaboration:** The project team is establishing key partnerships with community organizations from around the city that would like to support programming and activation within Civic Area. The project team sees the collaboration launching this year as a way to implement the recommendation from council to partner with community organizations,

nonprofits and other key community stakeholders in bringing Civic Area to life—as well as supporting the work to make the engagement process more equitable and transparent.

- **Social Behaviors - Operations and Safety Team:** Feedback from the community and City Council identifies the need to define acceptable social behaviors that reflect the community's shared goals for Civic Area to create a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space for everyone. As part of developing the Park Management Plan, the project team is coordinating with the Safe and Managed Public Spaces team (SAMPS), the Boulder Police Department, the Housing and Human Services Department and others to address community concerns about safety in the Civic Area.
- **Governance Strategic Group:** The project team is working closely with the Community Vitality Department to coordinate governance for the Civic Area in conjunction with the Districts Analysis and Commercial Areas Blueprint to align with larger city-wide goals across Boulder's major urban districts. Governance evaluation started in 2024 and will run through 2026 in alignment with these parallel efforts.

NEXT STEPS

The team will take findings from the planning analysis phase, including community engagement and council input, to develop the concept plan for the Civic Area, which will be ready by the end of Q2. With the concept plan in place, a third engagement window will be held for community input on the concept design plan through the summer. Based on findings from engagement window 3, the team will bring the design concept plan to council in Q4 for questions and feedback. A critical part of the feedback will be to identify what aspects of the design concept plan will be prioritized for the \$18 million dollars in funding. With this information in hand, the identified priorities will inform what moves forward into the final stages of the project, schematic design, construction drawings and implementation of phase 2.

Project Touch Points:

- Planning Analysis
 - Incorporate council input into the emerging design
- Concept Design: Launched at the beginning of 2025
 - Engagement Window 3: Connecting to Nature (pop-up series): June – September 2025
 - Monday, June 16 - Pop-up grand opening, Meadow Music with Jeff and Paige
 - Monday, July 14 - Meadow Music with Jeff and Paige at the Bandshell
 - And more events to come: food trucks and collaborations with existing summer festivals such as Creek Fest
- City Council Concept Review: End of 2025

ATTACHMENTS

A – Planning Analysis Summary, Part 1 and Part 2

B – Programming and Use Study Summary