What We Heard
Phase 3: January 2019 to February 2019

Seeking Feedback on Opportunities in the Wider Alpine-Balsam Area

This phase of community engagement focused on learning about preferences for future opportunities and planning in the area around the former hospital site. The goal was to learn about the community’s preferences related to land use goals, character, access, and mobility to inform choices for the area plan. Staff sought to implement lessons learned from earlier engagement, including hosting events closer to the site and hosting a total of 10 engagement opportunities at different times and days to accommodate a variety of participant needs.

The mini-workshop format (facilitated small group discussions) allowed participants to have an open dialogue with each other and staff to listen to and document the range of feedback. Maps, dots, and trace paper, as well as note-taking at the workshops facilitated hands-on interaction. Approximately 120 people participated in the workshops.

For those who were unable to attend a small group workshop, a questionnaire on BeHeardBoulder.org was available that mirrored the workshop format.

Key Takeaways – Themes from Feedback

- **Neighborhood Quality of Life is High.** This results from a mix of people; mix of housing; character and safety of residential areas; walkability and access to activity in park and centers, downtown and mountains.
- **Neighborhood Center functions well and is beloved.** Take care in considering changes. People appreciate the current look and feel of the center as well as easy access to a range of retail, commercial and medical uses in the area.
- **Mixed Views on New Housing and Density** Some neighborhood residents have concerns about adding too much housing on the city’s site that is “too big” and could negatively impact traffic, parking, services, and visual character. Conversely, others see the area as an ideal location to add density in order to address critical housing needs in an innovative and attractive way.
- **Recreation, Open and Green Spaces** – People LOVE North Boulder Park but as the area changes, other green and open spaces will be important for connections and places to gather. Changes for flood mitigation should be carefully considered.
- **Access and Mobility Hub** - People appreciate the current ability to walk, bike, take transit and drive. There are concerns for more traffic and parking. People suggest
improvements for safety, ease of moving through the area with or without a car, and to promote all-mode mobility.

- **Redevelopment on the city site needs to be innovative and thoughtful.** People want redevelopment to fit in, support the neighborhood center, add value and have good public spaces. They want housing that helps meet affordability goals and provides housing that is most needed. They also want open spaces, welcoming places to gather and a little retail along with the city service hub.

**Summary of Events**

Staff hosted a series of small group workshops from January to February in the Brenton Building. One session focused on property-owners in the area, seven sessions were open to all community members, and one session was for board and commission liaisons. These workshops were focused on small groups of no more than eight people per table to listen and learn about preferences for the future vision of the area around Alpine-Balsam.

A variety of dates and dates were available (including weekdays and one Saturday). Times ranged from early morning (7 a.m.) to evening (6:30 p.m.). Demographics were not recorded at the workshops, however from the introductions, a strong majority of the participants conveyed that they were residents of nearby neighborhoods and intimately familiar with the area.

Staff provided a brief presentation about the purpose of the session and an update on recent feedback from Planning Board and City Council. Questions to the groups included:

1. **Group Discussion Land Use / Built Form / Neighborhood Character**
   a. What neighborhood features are most important to preserve?
   b. What neighborhood center attributes are most important?
   c. What are the locations that might be appropriate for new housing or increasing housing?
   d. What other ideas or concerns would you like to share?
2. **Group Discussion on Access, Mobility, Circulation**
a. What access & circulation improvements are needed to more fully connect the neighborhood?
b. What are your thoughts about expanding the Access and Parking District/Transportation Demand Management (TDM) approach in the area?

Comments were recorded by staff facilitators and participants were encouraged to clarify notes as well as write directly on the maps and trace paper. Photos of all the maps and notes were posted on the project website.

Informing community about workshops and Be Heard Boulder questionnaire
Invitations to participate in the workshops and the online questionnaire included:

- Direct mailing to property owners, residents and businesses within the area plan boundary
- Nextdoor, Facebook and Twitter
- Planning newsletter
- News from City Hall in the Daily Camera
- Project website
- Neighborhood associations/organizations sent emails
- Stakeholder outreach – individual emails to community and neighborhood groups
- Direct e-mail to workshop participants

Be Heard Boulder questionnaire format
Recognizing that not everyone would be able to attend a workshop, the city utilized the online platform, Be Heard Boulder, to create a questionnaire that summarized key themes people shared during the workshops. While the summary could not fully capture the depth and richness of all the conversations, it provided an opportunity for others to read the summary of themes and provide additional input. People were asked to complete the questionnaire only if they were not able to participate in a workshop; the goal was not to count numbers or take a tally of views, but instead round out feedback to ensure all ideas were presented. There is no way to track how many workshop participants also provided comments online. The online comments closely resembled the feedback received during the workshops. The summary report from the Be Heard Boulder questionnaire can be found here.

Community Feedback
The following provides a summary of comments from both workshop participants and responses from Be Heard Boulder, organized around the key themes listed above:

Neighborhood Quality of Life & Character
Workshop and Be Heard Boulder participants universally noted the positive and vibrant quality of life (“livability”) in the neighborhoods around Alpine-Balsam. For participants, this included: character, walkability (including to downtown and nature), variety of building ages and types, aesthetics, closeness to amenities, views, multigenerational living, mix of uses (residential/commercial), and level of service and capacity. The level of neighborhood activity
from dog-walking to playing with kids was highly valued. The neighborhood is a diverse social hub.

Specific comments about elements that are appreciated by the community included:

- The neighborhood look and feel, which for some included diversity of housing types (i.e., multi-family flats, condos, townhomes and single-family homes)
- Importance of the sense of place close to the mountains with its accompanying views
- Historic buildings and building facades
- Multigenerational aspect of the area, where design, housing, and area amenities could facilitate older adults aging in place
- The diversity of people (residents, employees, shoppers, park-goers);
- Desire to maintain the safety and security of the area both during the day and night
- Desire to capitalize on the opportunity to elevate this special place even further and to create more of a “village-like” atmosphere with retail at its center.

Specific characteristics that were appreciated include:

- Diversity of housing types
- Diversity, energy, and vibrant social hub of the neighborhood
- Multigenerational character
- Creative and diverse residents already in the area
- Good location to live for walking, biking, and public transit
- Character and visual style of single-family residences and low density

Be Heard Boulder participants were provided a list of key attributes of the area suggested by workshop attendees and asked which resonated most. The following chart shows their feedback.
Neighborhood Center

As the next activity, staff provided the BVCP policy description of neighborhood centers and asked about Alpine-Balsam characteristics that define this neighborhood center.

People highlighted the mix of nearby retail, commercial, and medical uses that meet daily needs of the neighborhood. They expressed a lot of love for the retail and commercial center of the neighborhood at Ideal Market and Community Plaza, describing it as “the heart and soul of the community,” which resonated with Be Heard Boulder respondents as well. The shops are unique, local, and charming. People noted that the retail core feels community-based and serves as an important gathering space day and night.

Figure 1: Results from online questionnaire on favored attributes of the area
Having access to medical services in the area as provided by Boulder Medical Center and other smaller medical and dental offices, especially with the closing of the hospital, was highly appreciated. Participants appreciated the convenient access to these services by foot, bike, or car, including availability of parking. Specific aspects that were appreciated by participants include:

- Mix of land uses (retail, commercial, and residential) contributed to connecting the community and making it self-sufficient
- An affinity for the stores and buildings themselves, noting the historic building facades and one-story buildings
- Close proximity to medical services
- Community Plaza as a hub in the area and a benefit in attracting other local services and businesses.

Specific concerns included:

- Fear that the existing retail center would change
- Losing the vibrancy of the plaza with changes to retail tenants
- Acknowledgement that the nature of retail is changing and could be precarious; noting the importance for regulations to maintain flexibility while providing opportunities for small local businesses
- Lack of vibrancy and stability at the north corner of Broadway and North Street for retail uses

Ideas that participants expressed included:

- Enhance plaza and mix of uses by adding a second floor (housing or retail) or developing the parking lot in the future (should be noted, this suggestion received mixed reactions, with some participants strongly opposed).
- More mixed use both at the city-owned site and the surrounding area. Several suggested a further study of what is missing in the area so the gap could be appropriately filled without competing with existing retail.
- More retail to serve new residents from additional housing.
- Affordable retail program to allow desired services/uses in the area to add diversity in retail and reduce tenant turnover.
- More entertainment, arts & culture, and performance space in the area. Space for nonprofits was also mentioned.
- Shared co-working spaces were suggested.
Mixed Views on New Housing and Housing Density

There are different perceptions about the current level of density in the area and it was clear how these perceptions strongly contribute to individuals’ preferences for how the area should redevelop. Many participants consider the area to be a low-density neighborhood, focusing on the abundance of single-family homes in the neighborhoods surrounding the neighborhood center. Others describe it as a mixed density area, describing the high and medium density housing to the south and east of the neighborhood center, the presence of a busy community hospital, active neighborhood park, and active retail center functioning alongside single-family areas.

Housing at City-Owned Site

Many workshop and Be Heard Boulder participants thought if there were to be additional housing in the area, the city-owned property was most appropriate location. Ideas that were expressed for future housing at the city-owned site include:

- New housing for people who work in Boulder but cannot afford to live here
- Build or improve existing housing character and diversity, supporting existing residents
- Welcome all ages and demographics by building housing for those 55 and older and allow for aging in place in a centrally located vibrant location.
- Build housing for families with children
- Emphasize new housing for hard-to-house populations, like seniors and people living with disabilities, as well as those transitioning from homelessness
• Build workforce housing, possibly with an emphasis on employees who provide a community or public service, such as teachers, firefighters, etc.
• Make affordable housing accessible and consider relaxing restrictions on the Permanently Affordable Housing Program at the city
• Mix of affordability, both low and middle income to support the middle class
• Include measures to improve transit and other mobility programs
• Include green space
• Make sure there is a variety of heights that cascade down into the neighborhood to create more visual appeal of the site. Taller buildings should be closer to Broadway
• Buildings should be varied in appearance and attractive
• Include “high-end” and quality design on the site that is consistent with the neighborhood (i.e., not a hodgepodge and not a self-contained box). Highland Garden Villages, Newton family housing, Prospect in Longmont, and the Holiday neighborhood were cited as good examples of mixed uses with no commercial space and good design (height, ages of residents, green space, and family-friendly) that might fit in the neighborhood.

The city also heard suggestions that areas outside the Alpine-Balsam area (such as Broadway and Violet, Diagonal Crossing, and/or East Boulder) were more suited to new housing.

**Housing Density**

There was a wide range of viewpoints on housing and density on the city-owned site. Two primary viewpoints emerged: minimal or low housing density and maximum or high housing density. Many participants wanted to understand the impact to the neighborhood. Participants who expressed a desire for minimal or low housing density described preferring one to two stories of housing, row homes, 12 homes/block, 140 dwelling units or less, or no housing on the site. Participants expressing concerns with higher densities noted:

• There could be negative impacts to neighborhood property values.
• Parking in general would be a problem, as they were skeptical that tenants would be interested in having fewer cars. Parking for seniors, in particular, could be challenging if parking was far away from their homes.
• The impact of adding many new residents on North Boulder Park, congestion on nearby streets and crowding at the retail shops.
• Higher densities may not provide family-friendly units that would be bought and remain owner-occupied by families.
• Units would go to commuters that work outside the city instead of people who wanted to be part of the Boulder community.
• Reduced amount of green space on the site.

Participants who expressed a desire for higher density housing expressed the desire to see as many dwelling units on the site as possible, citing the site as a good opportunity to address affordable housing as a critical issue in Boulder, with some saying up to 300 units was appropriate with others expressing the view that 300 units was too low. They said lower density:

• Would not maximize the site for the benefit of the whole community
• Would not achieve enough units to affect in-commuting and carbon footprints
- Was not efficient from a land use, sustainability, environmental perspective
- Would not allow for enough open space on the site; higher density and concentration of units would free up more space

**Housing in the broader area (beyond the city-owned site)**

Participants discussed ideas for area-wide possibilities for adding housing. The map below reflects areas that were suggested.

![Figure 3: Areas participants suggested for adding housing](image)

Comments about adding housing in the area include:

- Use the second floor on commercial/retail buildings for housing while maintaining sun access for solar purposes.
- Convert existing buildings, over time, to housing while preserving some medical services.
- Convert other medical facilities to housing.
- Explore regulatory changes to better support housing in the area through removing or increasing occupancy limits.
- Allow more OAU/ADUs as a better alternative to add housing stock with less land and without contributing to a feeling of dense development. OAU/ADUs would also be more integrated into the neighborhood instead of isolated apartment complexes.
- Support existing multi-family units and require property owners to maintain these; amend the code to allow multifamily units legally.
- Convert surface parking to affordable housing or add affordable housing above surface parking.
- Increase housing in places where there is existing housing but preserve historic character.
- Allow higher than three-story buildings.

Online participants were asked which comments about housing resonated most with them. This graph shows their perspectives:

Figure 4: Online participants' reactions to housing comments
Recreation, Open and Green Spaces
Participants were united in their love of North Boulder Park and its natural beauty. A majority of Be Heard Boulder respondents selected North Boulder Park as a resonating attribute of the area. Workshop participants wanted to maintain its features, views, and multitude recreational uses. North Boulder Park is valued as a gathering space and frequently used by families. Specific aspects that participants appreciated included:

- Mature trees in the area and see more greenery, trees, and outdoor seating
- Current quiet and peace in the park
- Opportunities as a community gathering hub

Specific feedback about concerns included:

- Overcrowding in the park if more housing was to be added nearby
- Mountain views becoming blocked with development
- Flood detention improvements at North Boulder Park would impact park uses and construction would cause too many disruptions

Ideas that participants expressed included:

- More green and open space in the area, especially in the city-owned parcels.
- More open space would benefit families and new residents, both improving quality of life and reducing demand for North Boulder Park.
- West to east green space to provide connectivity, flood mitigation, and open space.
- More outdoor arts & cultural spaces, such as events or activities in North Boulder Park.
- Additional family areas for kids in the area or park.

Flood Mitigation
While questions about flood mitigation were not a focus of the workshops, people were interested in the topic. Generally, community members expressed support for some flood mitigation at North Boulder Park, as it is a great opportunity to improve safety and drainage in the area. However, many participants expressed concern about how housing might be balanced with flood mitigation and how flood detention at North Boulder Park might impact park activity. Their concerns are listed below.

- During the 2013 flood, there was a torrent of water from North Boulder Park down to 19th, with high impacts on the intersection of Alpine and 13th St.
- A rigorous study of the area and system downstream of North Boulder Park should be done first.
Access & Mobility

Participants were asked questions about access and mobility. Staff shared information about the formation of an access and parking district for the site, and potentially the wider area, describing potential amenities that could be included for the wider area. Generally, participants wanted to understand the impact to the neighborhood and felt that the city needs to consider the relationship between housing and parking/traffic congestion. Many participants expressed concerns about increased traffic congestion with the development of housing in the area.

Participants suggested many ideas about increased connectivity, especially the importance of an east-west connection from North Boulder Park to Goose Creek for pedestrians and cyclists (especially crossing Broadway) and an east-west transit connection that could also serve to connect the jobs in the area to housing on the west part of Boulder. All the suggestions and concerns highlight the perceived lack of safety in certain areas and the desire to improve safety for nearby residents to walk and bike.

Beyond pedestrian and bicycle connections, improved transit access and frequency, specifically during peak times, was suggested as a beneficial improvement. Residents suggested expansion of
the neighborhood ecopass program as a way of reducing vehicle traffic and improving connectivity and safety in the area, especially for the multi-family residents currently in the area.

Participants responded to various parking and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies by expressing both support for this approach and concern. People were interested and supportive of mobility hub programs (car share, electric car charging, bike storage, shuttles). Others expressed concern about the viability of these programs to truly reduce the need for parking, the ability of some populations to reasonably travel without a car, and people’s preferences for travel.

Specific comments and suggestions include:

**Corridors:**
- Appreciate 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} as one-way streets
- Support frequent transit service on Broadway
- Recognize 13\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th} are critical bike corridors
- Concerns about:
  - Speeding in the neighborhoods, specifically on 9\textsuperscript{th} where there is impaired visibility going north down the hill
  - Vehicular access to and from area from Broadway
  - Lack of parking and high congestion during peak times
  - Transit routes only serve north to south connections

**Alleys:**
- Recommend improved pedestrian connections and amenities where there are alleys
- Improve connections through the neighborhood, specifically east to west south of Alpine

**Bike and Pedestrian Connections:**
- Improve crossings along Broadway as well as sidewalks and lighting
- Better east to west connections and increased protection on bike lanes

**Intersections:**
- Safety issues were noted about crossings at 13\textsuperscript{th} and Alpine, 9\textsuperscript{th} and North, 9\textsuperscript{th} and Alpine, and along Broadway

**Access and Parking:**
There was a wide range of viewpoints about how much parking should be provided on the city-owned site and in the area. There were two main viewpoints: maximize available parking for housing and use TDM strategies to minimize available parking. The former was the larger of the two groups of opinions.

Those who supported increased parking said:

- If units do not have enough parking, the impact to the surrounding area would spill over into neighborhood residential and commercial parking areas. Parking needs to be adequate for both residential, office, retail, and commercial uses. Businesses and offices need space for employees to park.
- Ability to park in front of home would be reduced, and parking in front of homes was important not only for convenience but ease for families and aging parents.
- .8 parking space/unit is unrealistic and an attempt to force behavioral change that will not succeed.
- Parking in the Community Plaza was already crowded and full. Accommodating additional traffic and residents would be possible under current conditions.
- The carless future is not here yet and the city needs to appropriately account for a majority of car owners.

Many who supported reduced parking were concerned that more parking would lead to large and unattractive parking lots and less permeability/connectivity in the area. A variety of ideas were shared, specifically:

- Investment in pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure instead of vehicular; while a carless future was not here yet, there is a desire to start somewhere.
• Become a model for sustainability, design parking in a progressive way, and plan for autonomous vehicles and less required parking in the next 10 years. Increased parking or parking structures are not future-facing.
• Encourage alternative modes of transportation
• Built for and attract residents who would like or are car-free and incentivize them.
• Promote small electric vehicles to conserve space for parking, perhaps through the creation of a community-based hub

City Facilities
There was a wide range of views about locating city facilities on the site. Some participants felt that housing needs should be balanced with civic uses. Many participants were relatively indifferent to the issue, and more focus was on the impact of locating a larger employer in the area due to increased traffic around peak commuting times. Some participants were curious about the impact to the site as city employees who commute to the downtown facilities are not net new employees. Many participants expressed a desire to hear more information about impacts and studies to make an informed decision.

Some participants did not support city facilities on the site, saying this is a neighborhood and additional offices were not desired uses. Others mentioned that keeping city facilities downtown would also be appropriate with the retail options on Pearl.

Some participants expressed excitement around the city facilities and civic uses as an opportunity to make the site an amenity, bringing added life and diversity to the area. It could provide benefits to the community, with space for meetings, classes, and workshops for nonprofits and community members. Some participants expressed a desire for the city to use their facilities to be a model for sustainability (LEED certification, net zero building with green roofs, parking in a progressive way to consider autonomous vehicles, etc.)

County
Almost all the community workshops occurred before the Feb. 12 City Council Study Session on Alpine-Balsam. During the community workshops, the possibility of co-locating county facilities with civic facilities on the site was not a facilitated topic. However, some workshop participants discussed the possibility; after the study session, participants had questions about how county facilities might impact the project.

Some participants expressed a desire to have county facilities instead of housing on the site. Some supported the city and county facilities together from a synergy perspective. Other participants supported the county finding an alternative site outside of the city. Some participants supported co-locating the county at the Alpine-Balsam site in order to develop the county’s Broadway-Iris site for housing as they believed it to be a more appropriate site for increased density.

Participant Demographics
At the workshops, a majority of participants was from nearby neighborhoods. Most of the participants at the workshops were white residents, ranging from their mid-30s to over 65. At the
Saturday workshop, more families with young children were able to participate. In the introductions, many participants mentioned children or family in the area. Several participants mentioned the amount of time living in the neighborhood as over 20, 30, 40 years.

**Joint Boards and Commissions Workshop**

*Introduction*

In 2018, city staff invited several boards and commissions to designate liaisons to participate in engagement events for Alpine-Balsam. The liaisons’ role was not to represent other members of their boards but to look at the issue from their area of specialty and from a citywide perspective. These liaisons were invited to a Joint Boards and Commissions Workshop on Feb. 18, 2019 that was structured similarly to the community workshops. Attendees included:

- Erica Joos, Kathleen McCormick – Arts Commission
- Lauren Folkerts, Rory Bilocerkowycz – Design Advisory Board
- Jerry Shapins – Downtown Management Commission (unable to attend but attended one of the small group workshops)
- Miriam Hacker – Environmental Advisory Board
- Masyn Moyer, Jacques Juilland – Housing Advisory Board
- Art Figel, Nikhil Mankekar – Human Relations Commission
- Pamela Yugar, Tom Klenow – Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Tila Duhaime, Jennifer Nicoll – Transportation Advisory Board
- Juana Gomez – Library Commission

*Key Themes*

Many key themes were similar from the workshops, including:

- Preserve and enhance spaces for kids and families and neighborhood assets (Ideal, North Boulder Park, local businesses.
- Good walkability and bikeability with room for improvement.
- Improve intersections and safety. Mitigate speeds.
- Improve walkable feel along Broadway.

There were several concepts that the boards and commissions emphasized or were more united in than workshop participants:

- Preserve community before cars. Any new development should support a walkable hub.
- Support arts and community space on site
- Encourage diversity through activation, mixed use, mixed housing, and mixed income.
- Support housing in area – types not elsewhere. E.g. mix of micro units, co-housing, stacked paths.