

Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan (BVCP) Assessment and Update Process Summary of Comments from Interviews – Fall 2014

Following is a summary of comments received from a series of interviews and meetings conducted by the consultants and staff in fall 2014. During the course of these interviews, the consultant/staff team members met with city staff from a broad range of service areas, including staff from Public Works, Finance, Fire, Police, City Manager’s office, Community Planning and Sustainability, Energy Future, Human Resources, Communications, Housing, Transportation, Environment and Ecology, Open Space, Parks and Recreation, and Utilities, as well as Boulder County staff. They also met with the City’s Master Plan Coordination Committee; Ecological Planning team staff; and Growing up Boulder staff; members of the Arts Commission; Downtown Management Commission; and Open Space Board.

During the interviews, staff and consultants posed a consistent set of questions to obtain a wide range of input in a consistent manner. Topics discussed included the following:

1. **Plan Usage and Awareness** - *How do you currently use the Comprehensive Plan? How would you like to use it in the future, once updated? How widely do you think that the plan is understood and used by the community?*
2. **Content** - *What are the strengths of the current plan? What are things in it that are rock solid, must remain – format, content, process? What could be improved (format, content, process)?*
3. **Issues to be Addressed** - *What are some of the issues facing the community that you think the plan update needs to address?*
4. **Update Process** - *Do you have any ideas for creative ways to engage the community in the update process itself? Any organizations or sectors of the community that you think are particularly important to reach out to?*

The following is a summary of feedback received from the meetings and interviews, organized in the same manner as the questions above.

1. Plan Usage and Awareness

- **Usage of the Plan varies widely.** Usage of the Plan varies, depending on the role that staff or board members play in the city organization. Those involved in development review use it regularly as an implementation tool – to provide direction regarding development projects, or to justify actions or support actions they are about to take as a city. Some use it as more of a “vision” document, to see if what they are proposing is consistent with the city’s overall direction. Some departments acknowledged that they have little knowledge of the plan, and do not see it as integral to their work. Many would like to see the Plan have more relevance to what they do – to see it serve as more of a “unifying” document, particularly for those service areas that rely on a Master Plan to guide their efforts.
- **Awareness of the Plan among the general community is perceived as low.** With the exception of Planning Board and City Council members, the development community, and a small number of planning-oriented citizens (many of whom date back to the initial growth management/land preservation efforts in the 1970s), most feel that the Plan is not widely understood or perceived as relevant to most residents or businesses. However, many think the community has a good understanding of and support for the Plan’s core values (e.g.,

growth boundary, land preservation, focus on transportation choices, etc.) even if they do not know that those concepts are contained in the Plan.

- **The Plan gets used by the community to support (or repel) proposed development activities.** Many noted that the Plan’s policies tend to be used by the public as either a sword or shield, depending on whether they support or oppose a proposed action.

2. Plan Content

a. Plan Strengths

- **Growth Management/Service Area concept is seen as “rock-solid”.** There is widespread understanding and support for the Plan’s focus on containing urban growth where it can be served and preserving rural areas and open lands.
- **Core Values (sustainability, city/county cooperation, environmental stewardship, multi-modal transportation, etc.) are widely supported.** Most believe that these values are widely supported and must remain as part of the Plan’s foundation.
- **Policies are generally clear and well-founded.** However, as noted below, many believe that there are opportunities to clarify the Plan’s policies.

b. Areas for Improvement

- **More focus on implementation.** Many think the Plan is weak on implementation and actions.
- **Clarify Policies.** The Plan’s policies in key areas (e.g., urban form, density) could be sharpened to make the intent of the policies clearer. (One comment - “dial up enough detail so that 90% of people will agree on what it says”.)
- **Strengthen connections to the university and other partners.** Partnerships are seen as critically important to the community, yet they are not broadly addressed in the Plan.
- **Update the format and content to make the Plan more community-friendly.** Many think the Plan is too much of a “planner’s plan”, and would like to see it repackaged in a way that would make it more accessible to the broader community. This could include a stronger vision, as well as a retrospective on how the city has gotten to where it is through planning. Do more physical, geographic planning (more about form and character), less narrative.
- **Stronger linkage to City Master Plans.** Many city departments rely on a Master Plan for their guidance and direction, and see an opportunity to strengthen ties between the Plan and their Master Plans, with the BVCP containing high-level actions and strategies to help integrate the Plan and Master Plans. Have a less piecemeal approach to planning in general.
- **Add Metrics and Outcomes.** While opinions vary on this topic, many think the Plan should set the foundation for the city’s increasing efforts to set outcomes and track progress and build on the c measures that are currently in the Plan (e.g., urban service criteria) or in master plans (e.g., Transportation Master Plan, Fire Master Plan, and Parks and Recreation Master Plan). Some think metrics should be

contained in the Master Plans, and that the Plan should set high-level goals and outcomes.

- **Integrate the Sustainability Framework into the Plan.** The Sustainability Framework is seen as an increasingly important tool for the city. While it is mentioned, it is not yet fully integrated into the Plan. However, city departments are beginning to use the Framework as a basis for Master Plan updates and the City Manager's office is using it for performance metrics.
- **Regional Mapping and Thinking.** The plan's maps stop at the borders and many of the policies do not stretch beyond the current limits, but the urban area influences areas around it and regional factors have bearing on the city.

3. Issues to be Addressed

As may be expected, the interviews identified a wide range of issues that the update might address. These are listed below (*in alphabetical order*):

- **Arts and culture** – little mention in current plan.
- **Climate** – action, adaptation, mitigation
- **Density/urban form** – identified as a top issue by many; define what we mean by sustainable urban form.
- **Disruptive change** – shift focus of plan from growth management to new challenges (e.g. climate). How to be more adaptive, dynamic, and fluid?
- **Economic development** – does it need a reset?
- **Energy Future** – needs to be considered in the Plan.
- **Fiscal health** – linkage with budget, capital projects, tracking fiscal health and outcomes.
- **Inclusivity/income disparity** – equity issues around income, public health, access, diversity, and wealth that can be passed to future generations.
- **Resilience** –with two fires, a flood, and a recent recession, resilience is an important topic.
- **Workforce and affordable housing** – in conflict with high economic levels and in short supply.
- **Youth issues** – interaction with nature, places for teens to “hang,” independent mobility
- **“15-Minute” Neighborhoods** – transition of neighborhoods over time; Where? How? How much?

4. Community Outreach Ideas

There is widespread support for transparent, inclusive, meaningful input from the community, and a variety of ideas were expressed about how to accomplish authentic participation. These are listed below:

- **Develop a Process Committee to sort through and prioritize best ideas for community engagement, including ideas below.**
- **Tap into neighborhood groups organized as part of flood recovery efforts.** This was mentioned as a way to involve many who would not typically be involved in planning-related topics. Also the Long Term Flood Recovery group might be a good resource.
- **Look to recent successful planning efforts (i.e., Transportation Master Plan, Civic Area Plan) for ideas that worked.** Both of these recent efforts were mentioned by many as having using creative new approaches to citizen engagement – both web-based as well as activity-based, storefront workshops and going to where the people are. TMP storefront workshops were seen as particularly effective, as were youth workshops organized by school district, university, and the city.
- **Look to some older successful planning efforts.** North Boulder Subcommunity Plan was a citizen-driven project that is also seen as having been successful for its day.
- **Use creative ways to engage the business community.** Look to engage business owners, but also employees and in-commuters or day population. Consider focus groups, employee surveys that focus on economic policies.
- **Traditional meetings/open houses not seen as very effective.** These events tend to attract relatively small attendance (unless focused on controversial topics) and provide low return on investment.
- **Make the Plan “real” to people.** Focus on real, concrete examples with visual tools for people to understand how changes to the Plan might affect them.
- **Consider a community-wide kick-off event or forum.** Bring people together from different backgrounds and interests at the start of the process, to generate discussion and interest in update topics.
- **Go to where people are and work with trusted groups.** Rather than organizing events and expecting the community to come out for them, go to where they are – senior living centers, schools, places of worship (particularly important for minority communities). Touch base with organizations, including but not limited to: Better Boulder, Boulder Chamber, New Era, Open Boulder, and Plan Boulder County.
- **Involve neighborhoods.** Need to do a better job of informing and engaging with neighborhoods.
- **Do “mobile” planning.** Consider a planning truck (like a food truck) to get out into the community.

- **Use newer communication tools, such as video and info graphics.** People get their information in different ways – not just written word. Be creative to hook people with ideas that matter to them.
- **Do some Planning “101” sessions** for people who are less familiar with the plan.
- **Tap into other local networks.** For instance, police have contacts and networks that planning may not have.
- **Consider outreach to county residents specifically.** Go to where the people are, in Gunbarrel for instance.
- **Engage with Boards and Commissions.** Facilitate meaningful discussions about planning topics.
- **Go to existing organizations’ events and meetings.**
- **Attend non-traditional planning events to do brief presentations.** Go to events such as New Tech Meet Up (5 minute presentation), Boulder Open Coffee, and Ignite (3 minute pitch).