



**CITY OF BOULDER  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM**

**MEETING DATE: May 3, 2016**

**AGENDA TITLE**

Update on Public Participation Initiative and motion to appoint one Council Member to a Citizen Participation Planning Committee.

**PRESENTER/S**

Jane S. Brautigam, City Manager  
Mary Ann Weideman, Assistant City Manager  
Patrick Von Keyserling, Director of Communications  
Tammye Burnette, Assistant to the City Manager  
Casey Earp, Assistant City Manager I  
Jean Gatza, Senior Planner, Planning, Housing and Sustainability  
Ben Irwin, Communications Manager, Public Works and Planning, Housing and Sustainability  
Amanda Nagl, Neighborhood Liaison

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

At the request of City Council during the January 2016 council retreat and based on community feedback, city staff is exploring ways to improve the City of Boulder's community engagement and public processes. In collaboration with community mediators and facilitators, staff will be developing recommendations to improve dialogue between the city and community members that would result in more thoughtful decision making and process development. The purpose of this agenda item is to request council approval to form a working group, comprised of community members, staff, and at least one council member, to develop a strategic framework for future outreach activities.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The City Manager, with support from community members, proposes that this small working group (committee) should conduct the following work:

- Analyze information and current city processes
- Identify best practice research and current successes

- Recommend improvements to city engagement processes and outreach that enriches civil dialogue and supports internal and external culture change around public process and engagement.

The City Manager would select members of the committee, including up to five community members with skills and experience in facilitation and community engagement; up to two neighborhood representatives; one council member; and up to four city staff. As a part of the first meeting, the core group will determine if additional representatives should be invited to enhance the knowledge, skills and abilities represented. The working group should not include more than 12 members.

The working group will be preceded by a period of project development to design the facilitated process. The council member would be a part of this design process as well. It is anticipated that the entire group process would begin in early summer.

**Suggested Motion Language:**

Motion to appoint one council member to serve on the citizen participation planning committee.

**OTHER IMPACTS**

- Fiscal – Professional facilitation will cost approximately \$10,000
- Staff time – Staff participation on the committee will entail meeting preparation and production of summaries of the meetings. Staff participants will be asked to acquire information and share information/ideas with multiple work groups and departments throughout the process. While staff time will vary for this project, based on the frequency of meetings and scope of work, it is estimated that the committee will meet approximately six times requiring approximately 48 hours of staff time in meetings and an additional 40 hours of preparation and follow-up work related to meetings, for a minimum estimation of 88 staff hours.

**BOARD AND COMMISSION FEEDBACK**

None to date.

**PUBLIC FEEDBACK**

Staff has completed 13 meetings with individuals skilled in mediation, facilitation and public process. Each meeting included a discussion about community perceptions of the city’s effectiveness at public engagement, and staff collected recommendations for improvements. Key themes and recommendations from these conversations are described below.

On public perception:

- Perceptions about engagement vary from generally positive to negative. People seem to be more satisfied with engagement when they feel a commitment from the city/staff to develop ongoing relationships with organizations and individuals.

Less successful engagement appears to create an adversarial relationship; it feels more like an “us vs. them” dialogue.

- A lack of two-way dialogue has led to “bad civic behavior,” manifested in a more argumentative, frustrated tone to conversations about issues.
- The limited opportunity to express views in three-minute open comment and hearings before City Council also leads to negative perceptions. People do not feel engaged in dialogue early enough or often enough prior to these opportunities before council. This also creates an impression for some that council is not open to input contrary to their views or that staff not willing to explore other ideas than those presented.

On improving process and approach:

- Better outward-facing stated city goals and commitment to engagement; set clear parameters for the type and amount of empowerment given to the public regarding decision making in any given process. Reinforced messaging and clarity in meetings about purposes, outcomes, ground rules.
- A shift in the city’s approach, from “decider” to “co-convenor looking to co-create,” as hosts of community dialogue.
- Consistency in the city’s approach to engagement could be enhanced with a design template that could determine the type of outreach for a given project.
- An ombudsman-style program could improve understanding by designating someone to walk residents through complicated processes.
- More community dialogue and discussion is needed that includes feedback loops back to council.
- Increased use of technology and social media could help the city vet ideas and survey public opinion.
- A “Citizen Participation Committee,” that includes community representation, staff and a member of City Council, could begin to organize recommendations into a strategic framework for the city.
- Additional engagement at initial stages of projects or issues that results in appropriate and meaningful engagement processes and tools would create more opportunities to inform and find understanding about issues.

On the need for improved education and training:

- Civic education programming could help all residents understand the value in civic participation and ensure that they are equipped to effectively engage in the process.
- Internal system improvements and staff training could help ensure the organization develops more consistent and effective public engagement plans, debrief experiences and future processes.
- Promoting staff training and certifications, such as International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) credentials, will create a common language and approach both internally and within the community dialogue.
- Emphasizing relationship building between staff and community and using professional facilitators wisely and purposefully will improve outcomes.

- Skill building around facilitation, active listening and deep understanding of community issues and input can make staff more effective participants in dialogue. Similarly, this type of training for neighborhood leaders may assist in more civil interaction and shared understanding.

## **BACKGROUND**

During the Council Retreat in January, 2016, guidance was given to the City Manager to reach out to members of the community who are skilled in facilitation, mediation or design of engagement processes. Council Members provided names and contact information for community members with expertise in these areas. Staff has since completed thirteen scheduled meetings with these individuals to discuss community perception and experience related to engagement, recommendations for process improvement and ideas related to continued inclusion of community members in city processes.

In addition to activities that resulted from the council retreat, an internal team has actively evaluated the coordination of public engagement across the city organization. The team, which is participating in the Transforming Local Government's Innovation Academy, selected engagement coordination as a team project in 2015. The group's project was to evaluate and implement low-cost solutions to shared challenges around engagement coordination. This work has resulted in several internal tools: contact lists for engagement personnel, vendor lists for organizational references, and videos about engagement success stories to serve as models that will help staff successfully plan, coordinate and deliver engagement opportunities to our residents. As the Innovation Academy concludes, May 2016, several members of this team will transition to supporting the new public participation initiative.

Staff have also initiated a study into best practices relative to community engagement/public participation, which will be provided to this committee, if approved, for review and inclusion in final recommendations.

## **ANALYSIS**

Staff has begun to incorporate feedback collected to date into current organizational efforts to improve community engagement and public process. These efforts range from new or improved use of social media to the development of a micro-business to prioritize the professionalism of public engagement design and practice within the organization.

However, the proposed committee could produce a more comprehensive strategy by allowing skilled community members to thoroughly examine the challenges and opportunities inherent in public process alongside staff and council. This approach will create an environment of trust and creativity in which the group problem solves, generates new ideas and provides recommendations for process change that are modeled on and studied through the group's own design and operating structure.

## **QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL**

- Does Council have any questions about this proposed committee and associated appointment?
- Does Council have any suggestions for feedback about the proposed committee and associated appointment?
- The recommendation of the community members is that the committee should use the services of a professional facilitator. These funds would be available in the city managers contingency. Does Council have any concerns with this approach?
- If the Committee is approved, does Council have any deliverables it would suggest as an outcome for this committee?
- Which council member should serve on this committee?