



CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

City of Fort Collins Spring 2023 Land Use Code Event Summary Report

Sabrina Slagowski-Tipton

Prepared for the City of Fort Collins by the Center for Public Deliberation with assistance from Kimberly Quintana-Prieto.

Executive Summary

This report synthesizes the conversations and themes gathered during a community-wide conversation about the City of Fort Collins Land Use Code on Wednesday, April 26, 2023. In total, 49 community members attended this event which addressed topics such as Community Input in the Development Review Process, Missing Middle Housing, and Affordable Housing. Below, we report the primary themes identified in table notes.

The analysis portion of this report contains three sections: Community Input in the Development Review Process, Affordable Housing, and Missing Middle Housing. The main themes from each section are briefly summarized below, though the full report provides a more thorough accounting of how community members expressed each theme.

Community Input in the Development Review Process

Main themes:

- Frustration with the current process
- Suggested improvements for the process

Affordable Housing

Main themes:

- The complexity of adding more Affordable Housing
- Location-related concerns for Affordable Housing

Missing Middle Housing

Main themes:

- Concerns about growth and sustainability
- Concerns about the location of Missing Middle Housing

Methodology

The Center for Public Deliberation and City of Fort Collins partnered to host a community conversation on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, at the Northside Aztlan Center. The event was broken into three distinct sections which allowed attendees to have small group conversations about pertinent topics tied to the land use code. All attendees were randomly assigned to a small group which was facilitated by a student from the Center for Public Deliberation. There was also a student note taker present at each table capturing comments and conversations. The questions and flow of the meeting were designed by the Center for Public Deliberation with feedback from the City of Fort Collins.

Participants discussed three main topic areas. At the beginning of each section, a member of City staff gave a brief presentation about the topic before we moved on to small group facilitated conversations. The three main topic areas were chosen by the City of Fort Collins based on their analysis of community surveys:

1. Community Input in the Development Review Process
2. Affordable Housing
3. Missing Middle Housing

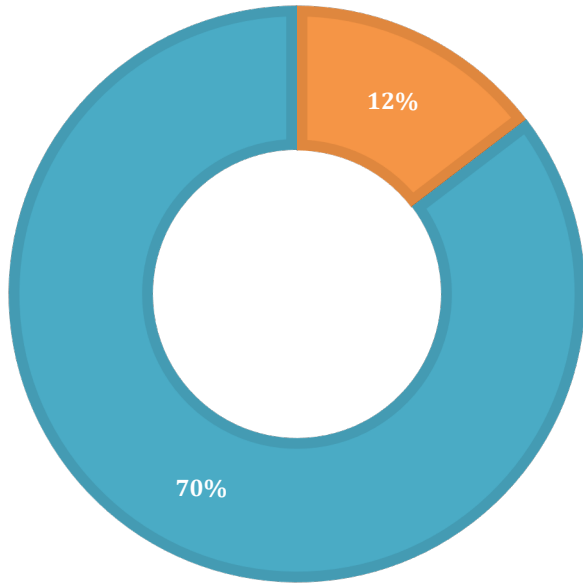
The data in this report was compiled in real time by student note takers at each table. The resulting dataset includes notes from 11 separate tables. After data entry each comment was thematically coded by a student researcher who reviewed themes across questions and tables. In the sections below, major themes are organized roughly according to the frequency with which they appeared in the notes, considering the following demographic information and knowledge that certain communities may be over-represented in the data.

115 total community members submitted an RSVP for this conversation and 49 ultimately attended. This is a large amount of attrition, so it is worth examining the various reasons for the considerable drop-off in participants. Of the participants who attended and provided responses to demographic questions, 40% identified as female, 38% as male, and 1% as gender non-conforming. Seventy-four percent of respondents identified their race as white, and 1% listed two or more races. Three percent noted they were Hispanic or Latinx. The age demographics were as follows: One percent of respondents were between the ages of 18-24, 3% were between 25-34, 9% were between 35-44, 1% were between 45-54, 20% were between 55-64, and 38% were 65+. In terms of housing status, 12% of attendees listed themselves as renters and 70% noted they owned their current home. 72% lived in a detached home, 9% in a townhome, and 7% in an apartment. When reporting household income, 3% reported making between \$10,000 and \$15,000, 1% between \$25,000 and \$35,000, 9% between \$35,000 and \$50,000, 14% between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 10% between \$75,000 and \$100,000, and 25% reported more than \$100,000.

Please note where numbers do not equal 100, respondents declined to specify.

HOUSING STATUS

Rent Own



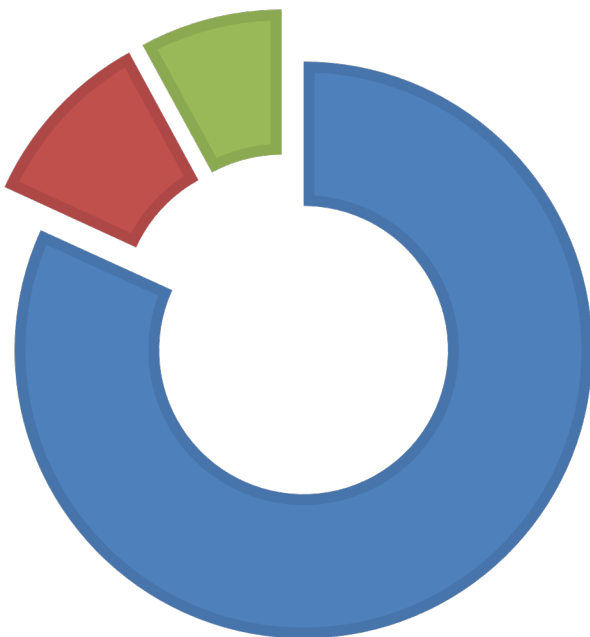
AGE

18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+



HOUSING TYPE

Detached Home Townhome Apartment



Community Input in the Development Review Process

Small group conversations began with a discussion about the Development Review Process. After a brief presentation from City staff about how the current Development Review Process works, student facilitators guided participants in conversation to address the following questions:

1. What personal experience do you have with notification of development projects, attendance at neighborhood meetings, or public hearings for development projects?
2. How much impact do you believe neighborhood input currently has on developments throughout the City?
3. What are some things you find helpful about the current neighborhood meetings and development review process?
4. What concerns do you have about potential changes to the development review process?

A vast majority of the attendees at this event had either attended neighborhood meetings or were familiar with the signage and postcards sent out by the City as part of that process. It seemed overall this group of community members was fairly involved in conversations throughout the City about the Land Use Code, Development Review Process, and other housing-related discussions taking place.

Across tables and groups, participants seemed to discuss the same overarching themes:

Frustration with the Current Process. Most importantly, across all groups it was clear that the participants at this event wanted to make sure neighborhood meetings were not removed from the development review process. While several frustrations were addressed throughout our conversations, most attendees agreed they value the ability to attend neighborhood meetings and give their input. However, they noted that they often feel as though their input is not taken into account by the City. Several noted there was limited to no transparency about how the City considers neighborhood input and what impacts it truly has on the process so they were left wondering if their time was well spent. Additionally, several groups discussed how they felt neighborhood involvement happened too late in the process and felt that was another barrier to their input being fully incorporated into final decisions about what was developed in and around their neighborhoods. Some also mentioned that neighborhood meetings often feel adversarial in nature; almost pitting developers against community members which makes them feel less productive than they might otherwise be. Overall, conversations across tables seemed to indicate that participants at this event hoped to potentially have more input into these processes in earlier stages.

Suggested Improvements for the Process. In line with the frustrations voiced by our participants, they noted earlier involvement in the development review process might be helpful as well as more transparent communication earlier in other housing-related processes. As noted in the introductory portion of this section, most of our participants had some previous level of involvement or at least a general working knowledge of the neighborhood meetings and yellow signage, however, many discussed making sure information about updates to code, new developments, and other things throughout the City be included in utility bills or some other mechanism. The hope here is that would allow as many people as possible to see them rather than smaller groups of people who actively seek out that information.

Additionally, numerous participants discussed the possibility of introducing clearer ground rules or a better format for neighborhood meetings that made them more collaborative across groups rather than adversarial. One participant mentioned that while conversations and deliberation can be challenging, it's important to engage with one another in these meaningful ways whenever possible. Finally, participants hoped the City would work to increase transparency about the development review process generally; especially as it relates to how neighborhood input is taken into account while decisions are being made.

Overall, participants at this event felt that there should be increased opportunities for citizen input and participation and that the City should increase transparency and make sure these input opportunities are accessible to as many people as possible.



April 26, 2023: A photo of the room during small group conversations

Affordable Housing*

In the next section, student facilitators guided participants in conversation addressing the following questions:

1. What are your initial reactions to the way Affordable Housing could be incorporated in the updated Land Use Code?
2. In your opinion, is it more effective to encourage/incentivize Affordable Housing or require/mandate it? Why do you feel that way?
3. What types of Affordable Housing would you like to see in your neighborhood? Why do you prefer those types over others?

The complexity of adding more Affordable Housing. Overall, groups seemed to struggle to decide whether it would be more effective to incentivize Affordable Housing or require it because there were many feasibility concerns discussed. Most of the conversations focused on resource issues throughout the City that could be exacerbated by building more housing generally, whether it was affordable or not. Groups grappled with concerns about the location of transit lines and wondered if local transportation would be able to keep up with increased growth if we added more housing. Additionally, participants mentioned concerns about sustainability issues tied to water and other resources. Most of the conversations eventually shifted to a focus on overall density, with many participants voicing their support for added density throughout the City and others expressing concerns about increased density. Those who voiced concerns noted the many issues above: lack of access to transportation in certain parts of the city, concerns about parking in specific neighborhoods if more dense housing was added, and an overall concern about natural resources.

Many participants also continued to discuss the role CSU played in helping make sure more affordable housing was available throughout the City. Numerous participants across tables had conversations about how CSU could make housing more available for students to help with the strain on housing in general throughout the community. Groups struggled to determine the best ways to make sure more truly affordable housing could be added in the community.

Participants at certain tables discussed providing incentives that would encourage developers to use more sustainable materials in their new builds, some also mentioned the need for more buildings to be fitted with solar panels to address some climate concerns throughout the City. However, many also noted how expensive it is to build housing and were concerned that incentives would ultimately not work. For the most part, it seems that participants had robust conversations about the numerous complexities surrounding affordable housing, natural resources, and overall sustainability of adding new housing. There was a lot of back and forth which serves to highlight how challenging these issues are and how important it is to have continued, thoughtful conversations about paths forward.

**For this section, the conversation focused on the formal definition of affordable which is defined as housing which cost no more than 30% of a family's gross monthly income for rent and utilities. Costs for mortgage, utility, taxes, interest, and insurance should be no more than 38% of one's gross monthly income for housing ownership to be considered affordable.*

Concerns about the location and types of Affordable Housing. Conversations about neighborhood character echoed throughout each section during this event. However, there wasn't a consensus about where Affordable Housing should be and where it shouldn't be. Numerous participants who live in current low-density zones mentioned they wouldn't want duplexes or triplexes near detached homes because of the overall look of the neighborhood and the potential impacts they might experience related to parking and traffic.

Various tables had conversations about the role of ADUs in improving affordability. Several groups had conversations noting how they would be useful for aging relatives, children, etc. but expressed concerns that ADUs would ultimately be used as Airbnb rentals or other types of short-term rental housing rather than being used by people who currently live in the community. Numerous participants also said they would like to avoid having ADUs built in their neighborhood.

Many participants discussed the importance of using more under-utilized spaces throughout the community like the Mulberry and Harmony corridors. Participants at some tables welcomed the idea of more diverse types of Affordable Housing throughout their neighborhoods if the design matched with the existing homes in the neighborhood. Other participants were wary of any new housing being built in their neighborhoods, affordable or otherwise. Overall, based on the themes in the notes, it seemed as though participants were cognizant of the fact more housing needed to be built, but sometimes pushed back on the notion that more density would equal more affordability.



April 26, 2023: CPD students Catie Marqua (left) and Siena DiGiacomo helping guide small group conversations.

Missing Middle Housing

In this section, participants were given a map of the City and a collection of Legos which represented specific types of housing. You can find a sample of the activity handout in the appendix. For the last part of this conversation, student facilitators guided participants through an activity and discussion based on the following mock scenario:

1. Your team needs to add 30,000 new housing units throughout the City. 10% of those must be affordable housing.
2. Work together to identify the areas that are best suited to add more density.
3. Multi-family buildings and townhomes may be placed either in an undeveloped area or on top of an already developed area, but they will replace whatever is currently there.
4. You may not place any housing on the CSU campus or natural areas.

This activity was adapted from a previous build-out activity used by the City of Fort Collins and CPD during a 2017 City Plan event. Participants were given the information that, according to the state demographer, Fort Collins was expected to grow to 240,000 residents by 2040. Through this activity we hoped to get groups thinking about how they may want the community to look if that growth trajectory ends up being correct and which types of housing might be most acceptable to accommodate that growth.

Some groups were initially reluctant to engage in the activity and several pushed back on the idea that we needed to build in anticipation of increased growth. However, once groups started talking through and moving Legos around, it was great to walk around the room and see what each group was working on together. Each group had a vastly different approach to placing housing and assigning an affordability percentage: some focused on adding housing throughout the City in specific pockets nearer to transit and amenities, others opted to place higher density housing nearer to the edges of the City in more underutilized areas. While groups planned out their housing and talked through things, we noticed a couple main themes that were tied closely to conversations in previous sections.

To avoid repetition, this section will be slightly shorter than the previous two:

Concerns about growth and sustainability. Again, an overarching concern amongst participants at this event tied to increased growth throughout the City and whether this increased growth would be sustainable in the long term. Some participants pushed back on the idea that the City “needed” to grow; wondering if there could be community oversight in making sure Fort Collins doesn’t grow beyond a certain point. These conversations also seemed to focus on a need for the City to address the problems current community members are facing rather than working to address problems far in the future for people who don’t currently live here.

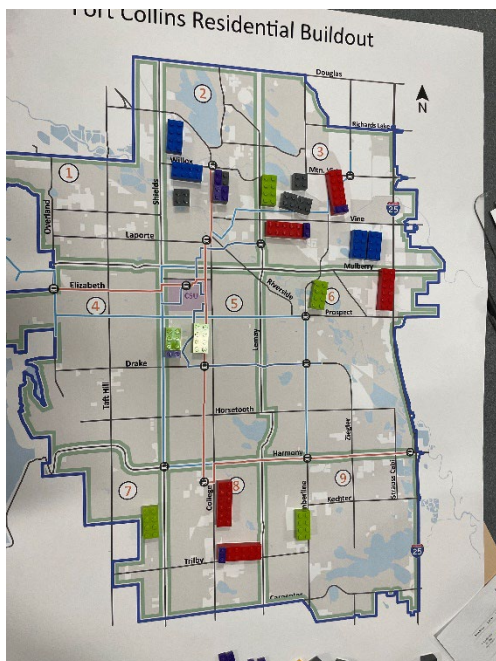
Numerous participants echoed transportation and resource concerns from previous sections, noting that building housing to accommodate more residents could unintentionally create other

problems if additional City resources like transportation, grocery stores, etc. were not made available in those areas. Various participants discussed concerns about added traffic throughout the City if more dense housing was added, and brought up concerns about parking in their own neighborhoods if increased density was allowed.

Concerns about the location of Missing Middle Housing. Conversations during this section largely echoed the concerns shared in the Affordable Housing section: the need to maintain neighborhood character when adding new housing, concerns about too much density placed in current low-density neighborhoods, and a desire for the City to focus on building more dense housing in under-utilized parts of the city rather than in already existing neighborhoods.



Participants and their CPD facilitator with a completed map



Examples of completed maps from this section's activity.

Conclusion

We would like to extend our gratitude to the community members who attended this event and engaged in conversation with one another and to our student facilitators and note takers who helped guide the conversation. None of the work we do would be possible without them! Matters related to housing and the land use code have become particularly challenging to discuss in our community, so we would encourage the City and our community members to continue having these thoughtful and honest conversations about best ways to move forward.

While this report noted several common themes across conversation topics for this particular group of participants, we are hopeful that the City continues to work on engaging more community members in conversation about the Land Use Code, focusing especially on the groups of people who may have been less represented at this meeting. Getting our community in conversation with one another is a vital piece of this ongoing work.



Student facilitators and note takers from the Center for Public Deliberation with

Meaghan Overton and Em Myler from the City of Fort Collins

Appendix

Missing Middle Activity Scenario

Our goal here is to work together to identify the types of neighborhoods throughout the city that are best suited for additional housing (near transit, close to amenities, desirable for families, etc.). The city is continuing to grow; in fact, it's estimated that we will grow to a population of approximately 240,000 by 2040. Having these problem-solving conversations now is helpful because we can work together to envision a city that can accommodate this population growth while retaining the characteristics we all love so much about living here. We can work together to decide how much and what types of housing feels doable in certain neighborhoods and talk through some of the benefits and concerns that come up.

Assumptions:

For the purposes of these exercises, we are operating under the following assumption:

1. The population of Fort Collins in 2040 is projected to be approximately 240,000 people.
2. We cannot grow outside of the growth management area.

Rules:

1. We must add a minimum of 30,000 new units. 10% of those must be affordable housing.
2. You must work as a team to identify the areas throughout the city that are best suited to add additional density.
3. Multifamily buildings and townhouses may be placed either in an undeveloped area or on top of an already developed area, but they will replace whatever is currently there.
4. You may not place any housing on the CSU campus or natural areas.

LEGO GUIDE

Residence	LEGO	Units	Example		
10% Affordable Housing Requirement			These can be placed on top of any new development your team adds to mark a 10% affordable housing requirement		
Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)		=500		213 S. Sherwood Street 1.5 people total in building, accessed from alley	Low Density
Small Multifamily Buildings		=1,000		223. W Mulberry Street Approximately 10 people total in 1 building/4 units	
Townhouses		=1,000		Bucking Horse Townhomes Approximately 195 people in 78 buildings/units; 2.5 people per building	
Medium Multifamily Buildings		=2,000		700 E. Myrtle Street Approximately 25 people in 1 building	
Large Multifamily Buildings		=2,000		Caribou Apartments Approximately 500 people total in 7 buildings; 50-100 people per building	High Density