

Honor Award – Community Engagement: Boulder Civic Area: The Year of Collaboration



Breakthrough Engagement: The Civic Area community engagement process broke new ground

for the City of Boulder within planning and civic engagement with one of the most “creative, comprehensive, and inclusive processes Boulder has ever experienced.” (Mary Ann Mahoney, Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau). In a city of 102,000 people, 5,000 people, between the ages 5 and 85, and from all walks of life participated for over a

year to create a visionary plan. The collaboration was at times playful and fun while always honoring civic input and practical, professional ideas.



Until the City Council unanimously and enthusiastically approved the plan in September 2013, the city had grappled for decades with how to plan for the 27-acre civic heart of Boulder. Several planning efforts had started but none were adopted. So, when in 2012 City Council directed city staff to “think big” and begin a transformative project, they knew it would be important to try new approaches. The communication and outreach strategies had to be just as diverse, innovative, and unique as the plan itself and rely on partnerships. The resulting process was an excellent example of how to collaborate, be transparent, integrate social media, involve people through stories and art, and creatively gather quality ideas.

In the beginning, the community drew pictures and engaged with art and in consideration of a series of questions: What if the area could be a transformative place for gatherings, recreation, and dialogue and innovation? What if it could showcase city sustainability values? What if it could maintain the successful farmers’ market and provide space for arts, culture, education and other events? The resulting vision plan describes a lively and distinct destination that reflects Boulder community values, where people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and incomes feel welcome to recreate, socialize, deliberate, learn and access city services. It reflects thousands of ideas from a process that involved numerous boards and commissions, organizations, and the City Council. During that time, the community came together in person and online to define the future of the area—one that reaffirms shared values and established a common vision.

Example of Innovative Collaboration: For Boulder, the civic area project redefined what innovation means for a large-scale planning project with citywide implications. Collaboration expanded – such as with the Boulder County Farmers’ Market, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Colorado, Growing Up Boulder, Boulder Journey School, Downtown Boulder, Inc., and many businesses. The project is foundational for long and fruitful relationships with partners, and the city now has a great model of collaboration for future projects to follow and concretely address issues and opportunities.



**JOIN THE DISCUSSION
DRIVE THE DESIGN
LIVE THE RESULT**

If Boulderites could redesign the heart of central Boulder, what would it look like? If you were given a blank slate to rethink the downtown's most expansive public area, would you take the challenge?

Well, the challenge is real, and the time is now.

- WHAT:** Boulder Civic Area is a visionary "public driven" project to rethink and evolve the heart of central Boulder.
- WHERE:** With city-owned properties at its core, the planning area is bordered by 9th to 17th streets and Canyon Boulevard to Arapahoe Avenue.
- WHY:** The goal of Boulder Civic Area is to transform this area into the city's social, civic, and environmental heart: one that prioritizes purpose per square foot over price per square foot.
- WHO:** You. Your Family. Your friends and colleagues. The city needs our ideas to help shape this place and ensure the result is public space designed with the people, for the people.

IMAGINE

Imagine the possibilities.
Learn about the Boulder Civic Area through fun, family-friendly events.

JUNE 2012 – AUGUST 2012



COLLABORATE

Collaborate on ideas.
Community collaboration will help establish a vision for what the area could become.

SEPTEMBER 2012 – DECEMBER 2012



DESIGN

Drive the design.
Work with local, national and international talent to develop tangible options for the Boulder Civic Area.

JANUARY 2013 – MARCH 2013



CONNECT

Connect your ideas for the future.
Selected options will be the basis of a community-driven plan for City Council to consider.

APRIL 2013 – SEPTEMBER 2013



PUBLIC SPACE DESIGNED WITH THE PEOPLE. FOR THE PEOPLE. BoulderCivicArea.com

A blend of transitional and digital events sparked discussion including meetings, multi media videos, challenges, and partnerships with community organizations were among the successful new approaches. They included working with InspireBoulder, a crowd sourcing tool; working with the arts community in creative ways; listening to very young

children; hosting an Ideas Competition and jury; and working with university business students in the NAIOP Challenge. Most importantly, the process included many elements of fun, while maintaining a steady and serious course forward.

Later, the city launched the ideas competition and 50 professional firms, students, and designers submitted ideas, while the community, children, and professional jurors all weighed in on preferred ideas online and at a live event. Incidentally, the 4-year olds picked the same winning “Sunday in the Park” design that the jurors did. A few months after that, teams of Masters of Business Administration students from Denver University and University of Colorado Boulder competed in the NAIOP Challenge to present their plans backed up with financials to the city. All the while, the community engaged online, at meetings, and at these events.

Through its partnership with Growing Up Boulder, the city was able to include the voices of young people in the re-design of the Civic Area. From 4-year-olds and 14-year-olds sharing their ideas at City Council meetings to city planners holding dialogues with high school students in their classrooms, the city worked with young people as true partners. - Mara Mintzer, Growing Up Boulder

Real Outcomes: A year later, Boulder answered the initial questions and provided vibrant visual ideas and stories for how the Civic Area can transform into a place for everyone. In fact, the plan calls for a set of special spaces that reflect the community’s commonalities and differences. With a central park at its core, it provides a gathering place in which the civic, cultural, and commercial life of the city can come together. It emanates from outdoor green space and beauty along Boulder Creek and provides significant open space and parkland. It will be the spine of a unifying design that weaves existing and new facilities into a rich array of civic, commercial, recreational, artistic, cultural, and educational amenities and programs. The Civic Area will also continue to be the service center for Boulder’s municipal government and a new center for innovation, where community members, officials, and partners can meet, interact, create, deliberate and innovate. Most importantly, it is a plan for all the people who have been involved and who will spend time in the area. In 2014, the city is moving forward with activating and implementing the plan.

Transferable Approach: All of the engagement strategies used in the Civic Area could work in any community because they were creatively developed to fit community values at a relatively low cost, by leveraging partnerships. The low-cost online tools, design competition, and partnerships with the business community are all transferable, even in communities with limited resources.

Main Project website: BoulderCivicArea.com

Video: [Boulder Civic Area: The Year of Collaboration](#) This motion graphic tells the story of the year-long collaborative process.

Other multimedia links for the project: [Civic Area Multimedia](#)

I was impressed by how the city reached out to the Boulder community. Especially exciting was how willing they were to collaborate with the arts to attract, involve, and inspire ordinary folks to get excited in the planning process – and to unleash their creativity to think beyond the box. - Marda Kirn, Eco Arts Connections

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