

The East Boulder Subcommunity Plan

General Planning Project Honor Award

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What is the future of Boulder’s industrial neighborhoods and office parks? This question was at the heart of the East Boulder Subcommunity Plan, a three-year effort adopted by Planning Board and City Council in 2022. Today, the 1600 acre area supports about 17,000 jobs but includes no residential areas and has very little retail or service. The Plan guides the evolution of East Boulder, one of the city’s 10 subcommunities, over the next two decades into a local business hub, with a variety of housing options and an artful community that is well connected to the surrounding city and the region.

One of the plan’s long-term outcomes is new, mixed-use neighborhoods in key locations. Housing will be integrated into these areas, as well as mobility improvements to support biking, walking and transit throughout the subcommunity. The goal of these “15-minute neighborhoods” is to decrease car dependence and make walking and biking safe and convenient, ultimately helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions, one of the City of Boulder’s climate goals.

The project launched in 2019 and after three years, 24 engagement opportunities, 72 meetings with boards, advocacy groups, a community working group and City Council, and one international pandemic that slashed the project budget and caused a loss in city planning staff, the plan was unanimously adopted by both Planning Board and City Council.

The planning process led to a lot of firsts for the city. This was the first project that employed “Community Connectors,” members of under-represented communities who partnered with the project team to co-design and co-facilitate engagement for equitable opportunities in decision-making. This was the first time our staff built a digital twin of the city and employed 3D modeling software to test impacts of different scenarios, providing the community with a data-based understanding for land use choices.

This was also the first time we shifted a major planning project from an in-person engagement strategy to a completely virtual space, integrating video, online meetings and interactive mapping to help the community understand the issues, participate in the process and ultimately create the vision for an important place in the city.

The city is currently engaged with the implementation of the plan, working toward a rezoning strategy based on the adopted plan and updates to the city’s Form-Based Code, which may be applied to neighborhoods identified in the plan. Stay up to date on the exciting things coming to East Boulder at bldr.fyi/EastBoulder.