



2023 Listening Tour with Mayor Yemi & City Council District 2 Feedback Summary Report

Overview: This report provides a summary of all of the feedback captured at the District 2 Listening Session with City Council President Randy Helms (District 2), Councilmember David Leinweber (At-Large), and Councilmember Brian Risley (At-Large) at Liberty High School on Aug. 25. Feedback received from this session does not necessarily reflect feedback solely from residents who live in District 2.

Summary:

Public Safety & Homelessness:

Slow police response times and 911 response times were raised by most attendees, and most felt that CSPD is understaffed. From a public safety perspective, fire danger and the need for mitigation efforts and evacuation plans were raised as frequently as homelessness. Many citizens requested better lighting in public spaces like parks and trailheads.

The need for more mental health resources, drug rehabilitation resources, drug testing centers, and mental health institutions (in lieu of jails) was also raised multiple times.

Infrastructure & Utilities:

The need for better public transportation and multi-modal transportation options was a near-universal request. Attendees asked for light rail, the Front Range Rail, more bike lanes, and safe biking routes, and almost always mentioned the need for more buses, bus routes, and cleaner/safer buses – and expressed support to fund these services.

As with other listening sessions, roadway maintenance was a frequent criticism, but participants also made frequent mention of the need for the Powers to I-25 connection to be completed and for roadways along North Voyager, Interquest Parkway, Northgate, and Northeast Pine Creek to be expanded and/or completed prior to the opening of the new amphitheater. Also as in other listening sessions, citizens frequently brought up the need for more East – West traffic corridors and the need for an 'Eastside highway or bypass without traffic lights' for Eastside commuters travelling North-South.

The importance of water conservation, particularly as related to development of new housing, was frequently mentioned. Citizens asked for more information and consideration from planning authorities regarding water usage and asked the city to incentivize water-conscious choices like xeriscaping.

Economy:

Many felt that the Olympic Museum and the “Olympic City” / “City for Champions” is good branding for the City and attracting tourists, although several requested that the City do more to advertise it. Several attendees felt that the City could be doing more to support small businesses and attract manufacturing jobs and other well-paid jobs beyond Department of Defense and ‘minimum wage chain’ jobs. Several voiced opposition to the number of chain restaurants along the Interquest corridor. Additionally, there was strong sentiment expressed around the influence of developers and the impact of large-scale projects in changing the character of D2 (i.e. Amphitheater and the proposed 232 unit affordable housing complex in Pine Creek).

Additional comments expressed support for raising the Lodgers and Automobile Rental Tax (LART) to support City services and infrastructure, and while the Colorado Springs Airport received a few good reviews, people asked for better terminal services, lounges, and more destinations.

Housing / Development:

Much of the commentary in this category was centered around the affordable housing project in Pine Creek, with residents expressing concerns over fire danger, evacuation routes, and the aesthetics of the project. Beyond just that single project, many raised concerns over too much density in suburban areas and associated fire danger, traffic congestion, and water usage.

Many felt that developers should be required to fund parks, roadways and other infrastructure, schools, and other community-benefit amenities. Several mentioned that the donation of land to build a future school isn’t enough, especially when the school district can’t afford to build the school anyway. And while many raised the need for more affordable housing, many also expressed that there is too much ‘capital-A Affordable’ housing and too much high-end housing, but not enough ‘middle housing’ – ie, townhomes, duplexes, condos, and attainable lower-density multifamily.

City Governance / Administration:

Many felt that the City’s website is not user-friendly and is difficult to navigate. Several attendees also expressed that the City should be more transparent and actively communicate long-term plans for development, infrastructure, utility resources, and growth – several felt that communication surrounding these issues comes too late and too infrequently.

Schools / Education:

Citizens expressed concerns for the student population of D20, with many stating that it feels overcrowded. The need for more vocational training was also mentioned frequently, and additional commentary was provided stating school boards are being discriminatory toward minority and LGBT students.

Early childhood care and education was also raised – multiple attendees stated that childcare was difficult to find and that many childcare centers had 6-9 monthlong wait lists.

Other Topics:

A few attendees expressed gratitude for 'keeping Space Force' and gratitude for a 'vibrant downtown that is attracting young folks' to the community. A few other comments asking specific questions about water rationing and lowering tax rates for those with caregiver status were also provided.

Full Notes:

Organized by topic; asterisk (*) indicates sentiment repeated.

Topic: Public Safety & Homelessness

- CSPD is understaffed and has unacceptably long wait times.*****
- Neighborhoods need better wildfire mitigation support / strategies.
- Citywide homelessness is a major problem.***
- Homelessness should not just be a police issue – need mental health, drug treatment, drug testing to prevent accidental death.**
- Need hospitals and other centers to house / care for mental health patients – not jail.
- Need more mental health resources.
- Property crimes (theft, vandalism) on the rise.
- Need 'park ranger system' for patrolling parks and trails.*
- Parks / trail parking lots need more lighting for safety.**
- Allowing tall wooden fences is major fire hazard.

Topic: Infrastructure & Utilities

- Affordable housing must have public transportation access onsite or nearby.
- Colorado Springs Utilities does not have any accountability because of relationship with City Council.
- Citywide traffic study needed; some areas consistently bottlenecked.
- Require new roadways to have multi-modal transportation included (sidewalks, bike lanes).
- 'Abbey Detention Pond' for stormwater near Wolf Ranch overflows and is destroying adjacent properties.
- Developers should be required to build solar into new homes and developments.
- Traffic studies are done at the wrong time of the year.*
- Traffic problems getting much worse.***
- City public transportation is severely lacking; need more multi-modal public options.*****
- City needs a 'metro system' or light rail system for better public transportation.***
- Need Front Range Rail for connection to Denver.***
- Northern neighborhoods 'need downtown's biking infrastructure'.
- Offer more incentives for smart thermostats, native plants, less grass, more conservation.
- City lets weeds, natural grasses get way too long and out of control in medians and other public spaces – ugly and fire danger.**
- Colorado Springs Utilities has better customer experience 'than most other utilities'.
- City needs to build an east side highway or bypass – major north-south roadway without traffic lights.
- City roads in terrible condition.

- Not enough electric vehicle chargers in Colorado Springs.**
- Get Powers to I-25 connection completed.***
- Powers corridor needs sound barrier walls.
- Old Ranch Road needs bike lanes.
- Trash is expensive, recycling is not robust, and composting services not available.
- Roadways around the new amphitheater need to be expanded / built before it opens, including Powers connection.
- PikeRide needs better funding from city.
- Powers Corridor needs a dedicated bus line.
- East to West roadways in the city are severely lacking; need more than just Woodmen Rd.**

Topic: Economy

- Olympic Museum is great for tourism but advertise it more.**
- Need better mix of employer recruitment – too Department of Defense / tech focused.
- Raise Lodgers and Automobile Rental Tax (LART) to fund infrastructure.
- ‘Too many minimum wage chain restaurants’***
- Expand flight options at Colorado Springs Airport / more terminal services / lounges.
- Increase support for small biz, not just large companies.
- Need more manufacturing jobs.
- Sports well supported; arts / creative economy not well supported by city.

Topic: Housing / Development

- Need affordable housing for first responders.
- Fire evacuation routes need to be identified and planned.*****
- Revitalize / redevelop Chapel Hills Mall.**
- City Planning / Zoning not taking resident input.
- Losing the ‘soul of the city’ – i.e., 7 fast food burger chains in ½ mile area of Interquest.
- Keep ‘green belts’, protect open spaces.
- Need more affordable housing.
- Need affordable housing that ‘doesn’t look like section 8 housing’.
- City needs ‘middle housing’ – townhomes, duplexes – instead of single family and apartments.**
- Require apartment developments to ‘blend in with surroundings.’
- Need more ‘smart traffic’ plans – red lights not timed efficiently.
- Night lighting on Briargate Blvd out for over 6 months before city fixed.
- Developers need to pay more money to fund schools and parks, not just donate land when district can’t afford to build the schools.
- Developers need to pay more money ‘to fund infrastructure they rely on’.
- Developers are ‘running the city’.
- New housing options marketed as affordable are attainable, not Affordable.
- Single family developers are building houses too close together, which is a fire hazard.
- Need to encourage developers to build more parking garages instead of wasting space with huge lots.
- Restrict AirBnBs / short term rentals to boost housing supply.

- Pine Creek cannot support high-density apartments.***

Topic: City Governance / Government Administration

- Want more transparency in City spending.
- Non-incorporated areas of the city feel left out / no voice.
- City websites are extremely difficult to navigate.**
- Citizens who work can't often attend City Council meetings due to scheduling.
- City needs to communicate long-term infrastructure, utility plans better – what the plans are and what the timing is.***
- “ReTool COS is just a way for the city to take shortcuts”.

Topic: Schools / Education:

- Need more vocational training.**
- Need more day care / childcare centers – many have 6-9 month wait lists.
- Stop discrimination against minorities / LGBT community in schools, school boards.
- D20 schools are overpopulated.**

Topic: Other

- Reduce property taxes for people who have caregiver status.
- Glad Space Force is staying.
- Downtown is vibrant; helping to attract young, educated workforce.
- Will existing residents ever be forced to ration water?