



SUNRISE NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE INITIATIVE

ENGAGING WITH A DIVERSE COMMUNITY ON
ZONING AND BEYOND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for the City of Greeley, CO
By Samantha Snyder

MAY 2021



The Problem: Zoning Discrepancies and Historic Disinvestment

The Sunrise Neighborhood in Greeley, Colorado is a culturally rich place, grounded in a history of working class immigrants, and filled with homes dating back to the 1800s. Sunrise not only houses a diverse range of Greeley residents, but also employs many, and fuels the economy with a range of commercial and industrial businesses. All of these land uses play an important role in the neighborhood and city as a whole. However, the current zoning code does not reflect the needs and desires of the community. Large portions of the neighborhood are zoned industrial where residential uses have remained before zoning codes were created in the early 20th century. These homes are considered nonconformities, meaning they are allowed to remain residential; however, homeowners are limited in their ability to expand and renovate.

The City of Greeley acknowledges the harm zoning discrepancies cause on communities and not only wishes to resolve this issue but to partner with the community to form lasting relationships, and come to a decision that is authentically inclusive and equitable. However, many barriers stand in the way of inclusive community engagement. Firstly, many residents likely lack access to technology that would allow for virtual engagement. This barrier is exacerbated by the current COVID pandemic that greatly limits in-person engagement. Secondly, a history of disinvestment in the neighborhood has created distrust within the community towards government officials.

Though zoning and land use regulations have been an important tool to create healthy and efficient communities, these laws are rooted in a history of racial segregation. Cities across the United States have grappled with the racial and political implications of their own town's zoning laws, especially outdated ones. Though Sunrise is certainly unique, and must be treated as such, lessons from this engagement plan process are universal. Though the procedural task of updating a development code may seem insignificant, the bigger picture reveals that the ways we engage with residents around zoning issues and solutions can have great impacts on the Planner-community relationship and the quality of life for residents.

Findings: Barriers to Virtual Engagement

The focus of the study and engagement plan is to partner with the Sunrise neighborhood, specifically. However, the team has identified two adjacent neighborhoods that would benefit from similar zoning solutions and community partnerships. These additional neighborhoods are Billie Martinez and Clayton. Both have similar zoning discrepancies and demographic makeup. Existing conditions research reveals that compared to Weld County's wider population these three neighborhoods share lower incomes, greater diversity with 70% of the neighborhood identifying as Hispanic/Latino, and lower rates of high school graduation. These factors can mean that residents of these neighborhoods are at higher risk of being displaced. Though, home values across the study area aren't as high as other parts of Colorado, they can still be unattainable home prices for those seeking homeownership, especially when taking into consideration the low incomes of the residents.

Virtual interviews with Sunrise community leaders have exposed the gravity of certain barriers to the engagement process. First and foremost, these barriers include technological and language barriers. Beyond this, there are likely additional economic stressors occurring due to the present pandemic that further inhibit residents from having the time or energy to engage as they may have before.

Solutions: Collaborative Engagement

Because the community is culturally and ethnically diverse, it is critical that the team cast a wide net of community engagement techniques in order to be as inclusive and equitable as possible. The author recommends a phased approach, grounded in collaboration, community partnerships, and relationship-oriented engagement that not only brings about zoning solutions in the near-term but cultivates long-lasting relationships between Sunrise residents and Greeley’s planning team.

Greeley’s Planning team recognizes that zoning and other planning decisions made in the past for the Sunrise neighborhood have not been oriented in equity and inclusivity. The team is committed to righting these wrongs by seeking authentic relationships with community members in order to invest and support the neighborhood in the ways that the community wants.



INCLUSIVE

Inclusivity means compensating involved community members, recruiting representative stakeholders, and using multiple streams of communication and techniques.



COLLABORATIVE

Engagement should emphasize community partnerships like schools, NGOs, and faith organizations.



RELATIONAL

By investing in relationships with the community now, future decision-making will more easily involve the public in the future.

Specific Strategies

In order to fulfill these aims, this plan includes specific strategies designed to include, collaborate, and partner with Sunrise community members and stakeholders. These include:

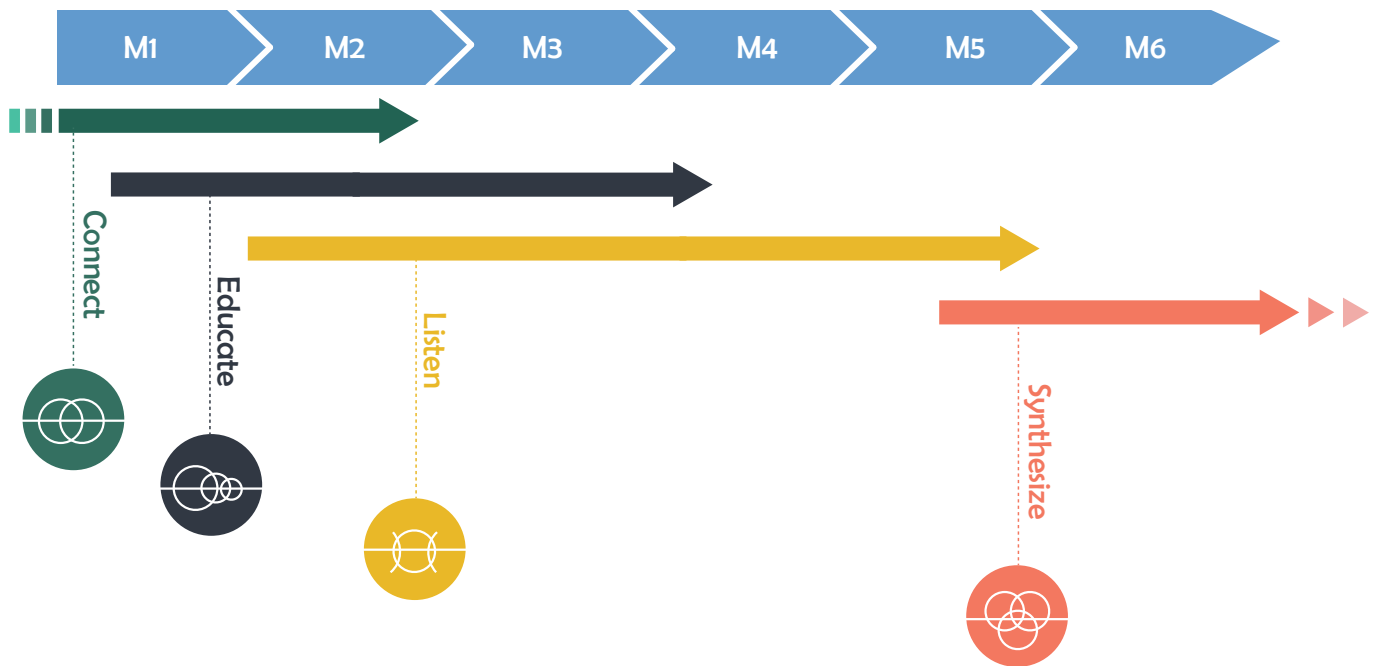
- Hiring youth canvassing teams from the local high school to talk to distribute educational materials to neighbors living in non-conforming households.
- Creating citizen learning academies for permanent resident taskforce to promote a long-term engagement relationship
- Holding workshop style townhalls that promote dialogue and active participation

THE PLAN

The author uses a phased approach to map out a flexible, yet detail-oriented engagement plan over a six-month period. Due to the uncertainty surrounding public health in the wake of a global pandemic, the Plan is uniquely catered to be adaptable to the needs of Greeley’s Planning team and community. The Plan includes a collection of online resources, engagement techniques, and recommendations that aim to strengthen relationships between Sunrise residents and Greeley’s Planners.

Figure 1: Sunrise Community Engagement Plan Timeline

Sunrise Community Engagement Plan Timeline Overview



Connect

This phase encompasses initial contact with the Sunrise community on an individual basis to help inform subsequent engagement. This phase helps answer the question: How would the community like to be engaged?

Educate

Clear and easy to understand educational techniques and materials must be used to best inform the community. This way, community members are empowered to make decisions regarding the upcoming development code update and decisions in the future.

Listen

Once residents and business owners are informed, there should be ample opportunities for these stakeholders to offer their input, ideas, and concerns. Input should be gathered in four ways: through door to door canvassing, online platforms, townhall workshops, and focus-groups.

Synthesize

Greeley’s urban planning department must synthesize the valuable input from each stakeholder group in the Sunrise community. Thereafter, city officials and a small task force of community stakeholders may come up with a solution and implementation plan.