

Community Values Guide Planning and Engagement in Golden, Colorado

Placing importance on what matters most to
residents in their daily lives

BY ROBIN MAYER



Golden, Colorado, USA, is a city of 20,000 nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, just outside the city of Denver. It has a rich history of mining, a vibrant downtown, and is home to one of the largest brewing facilities in the world. With access to recreation and jobs, Golden has long been an attractive place to live and work along Colorado's Front Range.

However, Golden's population grew by 30% between 1990 and 2000, presenting numerous challenges across the city. In 2009, in response to continued change in the community, Golden city officials initiated *Golden Vision 2030*, a

community-wide engagement process to determine the core values of the community in order to better plan for the future.¹

Using the Community Heart & Soul® model for engagement, Golden provided numerous opportunities for all segments of the population to participate in directing the future of their city. Block parties, community summits, festivals, and chili socials provided opportunities for more than 2,000 city residents to give their vision of what mattered most to them regarding Golden's future. A facilitated focus group extracted data from the more than 350 video stories that were shared. The information collected was distilled into 10 community values, articulating what matters most to residents of Golden. Three guiding themes emerged:

1. Accessibility and walkability.
2. An active outdoors environment.
3. Safe, clean, quiet neighborhoods.

These themes became ingrained in land-use decisions, code changes, and community investment decisions. Golden's community values and themes were not just platitudes—they are still used today in

meaningful and tangible ways to inform planning and policy making, including the city's comprehensive plan.

Rick Muriby, Golden's director of community development, has been with the city since 2008, and stresses the importance of broad community engagement. "We learned how to go about engagement to be more inclusive and to learn from each other." They learned, for example, that "we must go to where the people are. They won't come to us." He

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went on to say, “We have a greater understanding of our history now. Golden is the first community in Colorado to conduct a Native American ethnography study to identify tribes and their importance to this area.”

Community engagement in Golden is an ongoing process, and the city continues to innovate as it seeks new ways to involve residents. In 2019, the Guiding Golden website launched (guidinggolden.com), offering a new mode of community engagement to inform residents of upcoming meetings and collect input online. The city recently developed a *Community Engagement Planning Guide* to provide a framework for all city employees looking to implement community engagement processes.²

Based on public feedback, the city began working on *The Heart of Golden*, a special project looking at ways to improve the city’s Clear Creek corridor.³ The project launched with walking tours along the corridor. The city council approved the *Heart of Golden* planning document in August



2022, a strategic plan to guide community engagement and decision-making specific to the area.⁴

As recently as August 2023, Golden reached out to residents through a community-wide meeting, updating participants on the progress of the corridor plan, noting revisions due in part to budgetary constraints and asking for input on the revised plan. It was particularly important to hear from the residents at this time, as two of the themes—walkability/ accessibility and active

outdoor environment—were important factors in the land use along the creek for residents who often believed that they had to compete with visitors to use creek-front recreation areas.

Rick noted, “In the development of these guiding documents, the community values as set forth in the original Community Heart & Soul report were kept alive in the process and continue to drive the implementation of the plan.”

According to Rick, the value statements are still referenced

by new and long-term commissioners and residents alike. “They quote the values from the Golden Vision Plan and Comprehensive Plan. The values are kept alive through that.” Recognizing that major, long-term initiatives are subject to economic and personnel changes within the governmental structure, Golden continues to focus on community engagement in their planning processes. “Our guiding principles and value statements are ingrained in our community’s culture.” **RM**



ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

¹https://www.cityofgolden.net/media/GV2030_%20Final_120910.pdf

²<https://www.cityofgolden.net/media/CommunityEngagementPlan.pdf>

³<https://www.guidinggolden.com/heart-of-golden-2020>

⁴<https://www.guidinggolden.com/5233/widgets/46147/documents/36146>

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**—Thom Harnett, *Former State Legislator and Mayor,
Gardiner, Maine***

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