



# 2023 Listening Tour with Mayor Yemi & City Council

## District 6 Feedback Summary Report

**Overview:** This report provides a summary of all of the feedback captured at the District 6 Listening Session with Councilmember Mike O'Malley (District 6) at Sand Creek High School on Aug. 4, 2023. Feedback received from this session does not necessarily reflect feedback from residents who live in District 6.

### Summary:

#### **Public Safety & Homelessness:**

The over-arching theme in this topic area was that citizens feel that CSPD is very short staffed and response times, both to 911 emergencies and non-emergency calls, are unacceptably slow. Many also expressed concerns about escalating gun crime and active shooting incidents, both targeted and random. It's worth noting as well that increasing police presence and funding was not the only point raised – citizens also expressed a need to weed out 'bad actors' in CSPD ranks through better training and asked that CSPD become more concerned with community outreach and mental health awareness and interventions. Rising homelessness was also a major topic of concern, as well as some of the secondary effects including camping, panhandling, drug use, and the increasing presence of fentanyl-laced drugs.

#### **Infrastructure & Utilities:**

The most expressed sentiment regarding infrastructure was that citizens feel the city's roads, sidewalks, and curbs are under-maintained and in poor condition. Many also felt that approved development was outpacing associated infrastructure needs, but this sentiment was also frequently counterbalanced by several comments expressing the need for more affordable housing to meet demand. Citizens also expressed a strong desire for additional public transportation options, especially in lower-income areas of the city, and 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure solutions like green energy, 'smart' stoplights and traffic control, and recycling. The city's difficult east-west transit options were also mentioned more than once.

#### **Economy:**

Citizens expressed the need for job creation and retention, particularly for positions that pay salaries commensurate with the increasing cost of living in Colorado Springs. There was some degree of mixed opinion on the city's focus on the military, veterans, and the defense sector – while many expressed strong support for keeping Space Command and the city's emphasis on veteran / defense sector employment, some felt that the city focuses on this community at the expense of non-military retirees

and civilian sector employment opportunities. Boosting foreign investment and out-of-state/country tourism was also frequently repeated.

### **Housing / Development:**

As mentioned in the infrastructure category, many expressed the opinion that development is outpacing the city's ability to provide required supportive services and infrastructure. Again, this was frequently counterbalanced with the public's awareness of the need for more affordable housing to meet demand and slow the increasing cost of shelter. Many felt that suburban sprawl was getting unwieldy, perhaps indicating broader support for urban density Downtown.

### **City Governance / Administration:**

Many felt that maintaining or increasing transparency for city administration was important, and increasing transparency of PPRTA was mentioned as well.

### **Schools / Education:**

School safety was expressly mentioned, with many stating that preventing school shootings was a top priority. Several individuals also felt that the current state of school safety was causing severe mental health challenges for students, and that schools need to be a safe place and a refuge for students facing mental health challenges, unsafe or challenging home environments, and minority/LGBT students who may be facing discriminatory new policies from school districts. The importance of educating students for both college and workforce/trade jobs was raised several times.

### **Other Topics:**

Many expressed support for the Listening Tour, but encouraged other ways of obtaining public feedback and finding dates / times that would allow more people to be heard. Some raised the concern of separation of church and state, stating the opinion that Mayor Yemi may be alienating non-religious individuals by over-emphasizing religion in public-facing comments and speaking engagements. That said, several individuals also expressed the importance of activating the faith-based community to help address issues facing the city.

### **Full Notes:**

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

#### **Topic: Public Safety & Homelessness**

- Police are too short-staffed\*\*\*\*\*
- Police and 911 response times are unacceptable\*\*\*\*\*
- Community has had too many deadly shootings, active shooters, and close calls at businesses and schools\*\*\*
- Public uncertain what defines an 'emergency' that will result in faster response times\*\*
- Police department underfunded, perhaps some bad actors included in ranks\*
- Public unclear if police can be called to deal with individuals experiencing homelessness\*\*
- Major camping issue in D6 near Walmart
- Prevent panhandling in traffic / medians\*\*
- Public wants existing laws (anti-camping, anti-panhandling, etc.) to be enforced\*\*
- Fentanyl becoming a major issue, particularly in communities experiencing homelessness\*\*\*

- How are kids being protected from fentanyl presence in drugs?
- State-level criminal justice reform needed.
- Significant danger from street racing and bike gangs on Powers\*
- CSPD job application is discriminatory to single-parent families and minorities.
- Mental health awareness / services should be better served by CSPD\*
- Need safe spaces for LGBT population.

#### **Topic: Infrastructure & Utilities**

- Colorado Springs infrastructure is in poor condition\*\*\*\*
- Need better public transport, especially in low-income areas\*\*
- Build a light rail network.
- Not enough money being spent on roads and sidewalks\*\*\*\*
- Many sidewalks / areas of the city are not safe for ADA access.
- Do construction crews provide warranty to the city for work completed to ensure poor workmanship isn't costing city extra money? \*
- City planners 'more supportive of developers than citizens'\*\*\*\*\*
- City planners 'sloppy'\*\*
- 'Crappy Tutt expansion'
- Potholes are dangerous and out of control\*\*\*
- Increase reliance on clean energy\*
- Utility rates are getting too high\*\*
- Streetlights are being turned off or dimmed.
- What is happening with Drake site?
- Credit cards are barrier to access some forms of transit like e-bikes.
- Need recycling Downtown.
- Encourage more environmentally friendly city services and utilities\*.
- City stop lights poorly timed / not 'smart'\*\*
- Create a city 'wealth tax' on ultra-rich residents to fund new infrastructure.
- Restrict new development until roads are built to 'catch up' to demand\*\*
- Need urban trails in D6.
- Need better East – West travel corridors\*\*
- Build roundabouts instead of traffic lights.

#### **Topic: Economy**

- Not attracting businesses that provide high salaries / livable wages\*\*
- Increase foreign direct investment\*
- Are tech companies really coming?
- Boost tourism to the city / region
- Focus on more 'City for Champions' advertising.
- Olympic Museum is good but cost too much.
- Need to focus on retaining city's younger population.
- Need to focus on underserved communities in SE and SW

- City values military community and veterans but doesn't value / focus on non-military, especially retirees.
- Keeping Space Command was a good thing.
- Use tax incentives to attract more space / tech / defense sector jobs.
- Small businesses don't get the same treatment / tax breaks those big businesses get.
- Small businesses can't compete with \$19+ hour wages.
- Redevelopment needed on Academy Boulevard corridor.

**Topic:** Housing / Development

- Too many apartments being built\*\*\*
- Severe housing shortage – multi-generational households becoming more common because people can't afford housing\*\*
- Suburban sprawl is getting out of hand\*\*
- Build more affordable housing apartments\*\*\*\*
- Too many neighborhoods have too few ways in / out

**Topic:** City Governance / Government Administration

- Increase city's financial transparency.
- Increase financial transparency of PPRTA.
- City planners not prioritizing community needs.

**Topic:** Schools / Education:

- Work on internship / work placement programs for students in high school
- Schools need to be a place of safety for students who aren't 'safe at home'\*
- Shootings / guns in schools ruining students' mental health and feeling of safety\*\*
- Publicize Safe2Tell\*\*
- Schools need to be safer for LGBTQ+ kids; anti-LGBT rules and policies are discriminatory and need to be stopped\*
- Mental health needs to be a higher priority\*\*
- City should create an Autism Center
- Build youth rec centers on the east side of the city.
- Teachers need to be paid a living wage.
- East side needs a new library\*\*
- Resume active shooter drills in schools.

**Topic:** Other

- How will Mayor continue to unite the community?
- Can the faith-based community be activated in a more effective way?\*
- Too much religiosity in Mayor's platform / communications – non-religious people feeling excluded; need separation of church and state.
- Listening tour format is well-liked\*\*
- Host more regularly scheduled public feedback sessions\*\*
- Host public feedback sessions on weekends / after normal working hours
- What is being done to address suicide rate in El Paso County (worst in Colorado)?
- Mayor should reach out to Angela Stevens (NAACP President)\*\*