

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Equity Work and Indicators Update.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to provide Council with an update on Equity Indicators and work the Equity & Inclusion Office has developed since 2021.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. What follow-up questions does Council have on the topic of equity indicators and the work underway?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

In 2019, the City selected the City University of New York (CUNY) Institute for State and Local Governance to lead its Equity Indicators project and establish a framework for measuring and understanding the inequities that exist in Fort Collins and how they change over time. In this project, CUNY collected and analyzed data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other demographic factors to examine the broad landscape of disparities in outcomes and perceptions in Fort Collins and worked closely with the City and community to identify a pool of Equity Indicators. The final report was published in March of 2021.

The report's findings have served as a guide for the City to initiate and improve program design and implementation and apply a critical look, or equity lens, to identify and remove barriers or biases in policies, programs, services, and budgeting so community members of all backgrounds can easily access services. This work session is an opportunity to engage Council in dialogue about these developments and seek alignment on next steps.

The 2021 report provides a list of indicators and data sets, disaggregated by race, that were chosen by community focus group participants and then refined by CUNY. The list contains 10 domains, or main categories like strategic outcome areas, each with a set of two to five indicators. Three out ten domains are currently on the public facing dashboard: Criminal Justice, Housing, and Economic Health & Opportunity. These were the first to be displayed on the dashboard because they are the most important issues across all groups. There are additional indicators or metrics that CUNY recommended the City track and monitor and there is cross-departmental efforts underway to explore how to merge current metrics dashboards and assure equity indicators are integrated into the stories the City is sharing about

progress and impact. In summer 2024, departments provided an update on CUNY recommended metrics to Council in an August memo and attached to this agenda item summary as well.

It is important to note that not all the metrics called out in the report are owned by the City nor do we directly influence certain outcomes. Though the indicators report gave a good baseline, the City is in the process of selecting metrics to measure programs, services and policies we directly impact. This will help the City adopt data routines that help us understand qualitative and quantitative impacts. This work is in conjunction with the Customer Experience work being led by Blast X as well as the revamp of the City Strategic Plan which resulted in a more concise plan and objectives.

It is vital to recognize that many current inequities are sustained by historical legacies and structures and systems that repeat patterns of exclusion. Systems and structures create and perpetuate resource and opportunity gaps. To get to a future of shared prosperity, we must address implicit racism and bias that is baked into systems by way of policies, practices, and procedures that continue to perpetuate disparities in racial, ethnic, gender, economic, disability, age and additional marginalized groups.

The City operates in its own microcosm of demographics, socioeconomic circumstances, and opportunity areas unique to Fort Collins. The work the Equity Office has underway is taking the local context into account and designing approaches that meet the needs of staff and community. One way to support staff with applying an equity lens, is a method called Equity Readiness Assessment or ERA. The ERA is a facilitated discussion that help project teams evaluate how they have embedding equity or illuminate project areas where equity should be centered.

In addition to the list of recommended indicators, CUNY conducted community focus groups with residents of diverse backgrounds. Residents spoke about how they and others within their community have been impacted by disparities. CUNY identified four key themes that emerged across groups: social exclusion, intersecting areas, policies as drivers of disparities, and budgeting and representation within the City of Fort Collins.

DESCRIPTIONS OF CUNY IDENTIFIED THEMES IN ADDITION TO DATA ANALYSIS

Social Exclusion

Feeling socially excluded as members of the Fort Collins community came up in all of the focus groups conducted for this project. Community members shared many experiences demonstrating that feeling welcomed and recognized by the broader Fort Collins community was important for their well-being, and that social inclusion cut across all of the other areas groups centered on the Hispanic/Latinx, undocumented or mixed-status, religious minority, Native American, and people living with disabilities communities shared experiencing discrimination across a wide range of areas including education, city programs and services, economic opportunity, housing, and criminal justice.

Action: During the first years of the Equity & Inclusion Office being established, it was important to focus on making sure these often-marginalized communities felt valued, seen, and heard. For the first time in 2022, the City had an active role in coordinating and sponsoring Juneteenth, Indigenous Peoples Day, and Latino/Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations. In addition, through the opportunity of ARPA funding, Council approved the hiring of a Native American Specialist which has resulted in stronger relationships with that community as well as a city-wide land acknowledgement and fostered the community in creating a new Native non-profit, the First Peoples Community Center.

Intersecting Areas

Participants would name one area as important, and then immediately draw a link between other areas, for example, access to medical care and transportation. Some participants named experiencing disparities in housing (specifically home ownership and difficulties associated with being approved for a housing loan) as interconnected with both the areas of economic opportunity and social inclusion.

Action: Many policy decisions impact several Strategic Outcomes and Service Areas are starting to work more closely together to understand impacts and tradeoffs. The 2024 Council Priorities also provide an opportunity for departments to move out of operating in silos and cross-collaborating.

Policies as Drivers of Disparities

A systems-oriented takeaway that emerged in focus groups was the view that multiple disparities experienced by various communities are linked to policies and laws in place in City of Fort Collins and the State of Colorado. One example given in 2020 was the “U plus 2” occupancy ordinance which was noted to prevent intergenerational households or other cultural family arrangements that help alleviate economic hardship.

Action: In 2024, Council voted to eliminate the “U plus 2” ordinance to align with state law. This provides an opportunity to observe how economic census data and economic stability may shift over time.

Budgeting and Representation Within the City of Fort Collins

Participants voiced the opinion that the City’s efforts in working towards equity would be more transformative if the budget reflected that commitment more strongly. For example, in the area of housing, community members across groups cited a lack of affordable housing as a driver of disparities. Community members also named a lack of diverse representation across departments within the City as a driver of disparities as this meant that their concerns and recommendations were not well understood or shared by those with governing power.

Action: The Equity & Inclusion Office has worked with the Budget team to contribute to the Budgeting for Outcomes Process by updating the Budget Equity Seller’s Guide in 2022 and in 2024. The Equity team also met with each of the seven Budget Teams to discuss equity considerations in offers.

Spanish Language Community Connectors: The Equity & Inclusion Office has invested time and funds to convene the Spanish language Community Connectors group of 12 individuals to address the four themes described above. The 12 members represent several Latin American ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientation, levels of English language learning, and citizenship and undocumented status. This group has been meeting since 2023 and has learned how the City works through engaging with staff and using the Strategic Outcome Areas as agenda topics. This has given community members the opportunity to ask questions and learn about how programs and services are designed and implemented and has given staff the opportunity to learn and hear feedback directly from City customers who use and benefit from City programs, services and activities and are impacted by City policies. In 2024, the Community Connectors group has learned about Council Priorities and is engaged in dialogue with Councilmembers to learn more about their vision and goals.

Examples of Strategic Outcome Area Discussions and Resulting Action:

1. Safe Community:

Spanish language Community Connectors group met with Fort Collins Police Services (FCPS) and City Manager’s Office (CMO) staff to discuss the strategic outcome of Safe community. In dialogue the community members correlate lighting with safety, an element of safety different than how the City describes safety which is mostly related to water safety, emergency preparedness, fire and police services. Correlating lighting to safety opened up an opportunity for Utilities Light and Power to do a neighborhood walk through with mobile home park leaders. Staff quickly learned that since mobile home parks are often built in industrial zones that lighting would not be spaced as it is in residential zones. By partnering with the mobile home park leaders, guided by the Equity & Inclusion Office, additional lights will be put in 2024 (Attachment 2). Adding lights to Hickory Street provides the nearly 1000 residents in the area to feel safe at night, but most importantly to have their concerns heard by the City with the installation of three new lampposts.

2. Transportation:

Transfort staff attended a meeting in Q2 of 2024 with the focus group and heard several ideas on improvements and safety concerns the community has as Transfort riders. One main theme was the schedules and timing. Transfort staff listened and adjusted 4 major routes based on the community's feedback. Staff came to give an update to the focus group in August, about three months later. This is an example of responsive customer service that is advancing equity by increasing access to City services for disproportionately affected communities. Listening to 'vulnerable population' creates opportunity for growth and improvement.

These changes went into effect August 12, 2024:

- Route 5 ends the southbound trips at McClelland and Swallow providing a layover at Swallow Station and more reliable connections with Route 6 and MAX.
- Routes 5, 14, and 18 added an additional hour of evening service, ending during the 8 p.m. hour.
- Routes 8, 14, 18, and 81 had minor timetable adjustments to enhance on-time performance.
- Routes 14 and 18 departs from DTC on the hour.
- Route 18 has new routing leaving DTC to avoid using College Ave. The bus stop at College and Laporte (stop #157), with historically low ridership, was removed.

To see routes, please visit: https://ridetransfort.com/wp-content/uploads/All_Routes_Map.pdf

The 2021 CUNY Equity Indicators report has been foundational and informed the 2023-2026 Equity Plan (Attachment 3). The plan guides the City on how to embed equity into all aspects of our work. The Equity & Inclusion Office has identified three goals to improve the status of the four themes and help staff learn how to embed equity considerations into all phases of a project lifecycle. The three goals are:

- 1) Commitment and Common Language in the Workplace
- 2) Inclusive and Equitable Engagement
- 3) Data Accountability

NEXT STEPS

1. The dashboard will be updated and published by the end of Q4 2024. It will include 2019-2023 data where possible for the three themes of Criminal Justice, Economic Health & Opportunity, and Housing. In order to create more alignment with the City structure, domains will be reported under existing Strategic Outcome Areas of Safe Community, Economic Health, and Neighborhood & Community Vitality.
2. Equity Readiness Assessments (ERA) phase 2 will launch in 2025 with an additional process to help teams evaluate the impact of projects, programs and policies. ERAs provide teams with an data analysis and evaluation framework to identify intended and unintended impacts on the community. The Equity & Inclusion Office will prioritize meeting with departments or teams with approved 2025-2026 Budget Enhancements Offers to assure a formative assessment is completed to inform project design with embedded equity considerations.
3. ERAs will be accompanied by internal data analyst consultation using the Data Library Fort Collins Community Profile. This profile is designed as a quick reference for staff looking for high-level citywide and council district metrics. These metrics are the most recently reliable census data available.
4. CMO, Finance and the Equity & Inclusion Office are guiding teams to select metrics that can indicate

impact to help answer the question: How do we know that the programs, services, and activities that the City offers is advancing equity in our community?

ATTACHMENTS

1. Council Memo - Equity Indicators Update, August 15, 2024
2. Hickory Street Lighting Design
3. 2023-2026 Equity Plan
4. Engineering Project Coordination Map
5. Haworth 2019 Health Equity Index
6. Presentation