

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



PRESENTER

Lori F. Schwarz, Director of Planning and Development Services

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Sound in the City

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to provide Council with an overview of the Sound in the City project and an update of the work completed under Phase 2, including sound readings across the city and the results of community engagement activities.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. Ambient Sound:

Based on the results of the sound readings across the community, does Council wish to make adjustments to the ambient noise limits to reflect existing conditions?

- adjusting the baseline decibel standard,
- addition of enforcement based on a set increment above measured ambient levels (e.g., 5 dB over actual ambient)

2. Amplified Sound:

As part of Council's Creative/Nighttime Economy priorities, what level of flexibility is Council willing to consider for entertainment areas/venues?

- higher allowable sound levels,
- extended quiet hours, and/or
- geographically defined entertainment districts

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The City's noise-related municipal codes were reviewed by staff early last year due to changing conditions related to urban density, traffic patterns, and the expanded availability of entertainment venues. It was noted that the existing noise-related codes were resulting in an increasing tension between quality-of-life expectations, the desire for vibrant urban spaces and the preservation of neighborhood livability. A multi-departmental team, including: Planning and Development Services (PDS), Fort Collins Police Services

(FCPS), Cultural Services and the City Manager’s Office, began working together to identify the specific areas for further code refinement and community input.

At the April 22, 2025, City Council work session, staff presented a phased approach for addressing updates to the City’s noise-related codes. Phase 1 focused on high impact/low effort implementation of changes to the code related to traffic noise, fireworks and agricultural exemptions. These code updates were completed and approved by Council in May 2025. Phase 2 of the Sound in the City project centered on additional research and community feedback regarding two focus areas: amplified sound and ambient noise across the city.

Ambient Noise:

Planning and Development Services staff responding to resident noise complaints recognized that the ambient sound levels across the community now exceed the maximums provided in the current noise ordinance. This has made it difficult to enforce regulations when the baselines have already been exceeded during normal daily activities.

Staff conducted surveys across the city from April through November 2025 to document noise levels at selected locations. The ambient noise levels exceed the baseline regulations at most locations and appear to be most heavily influenced by traffic speed and volumes. There does not appear to be a correlation with zoning district classification. However, the overall ambient sound in the city has increased 5-10dB from current ordinance limits, specifically in the residential and downtown/neighborhood commercial areas. Staff is proposing adjustments to ambient sound levels as follows:

District	Timeframe	
	Day: 7am - 8pm	Night: 8pm - 7am
Residential & Mixed Use	Current: 55dB Proposed: 60dB, or 10dB above the background noise level, whichever is lower	Current: 50dB Proposed: 55dB, or 5dB above the background noise level, whichever is lower
Downtown & Commercial	Current: 60dB Proposed: 65dB, or 10 dB above the background noise level, whichever is lower	Current: 55dB Proposed: 60dB, or 5dB above the background noise level, whichever is lower
Employment	70dB - no change proposed	65dB - no change proposed
Industrial	80dB - no change proposed	75dB - no change proposed

Amplified Sound/General Sound Provisions:

As the last substantive update to noise-related municipal codes was in 2008, staff determined that a broad engagement effort was necessary to understand resident and business perspectives. In coordination with the Communications and Public Involvement Office, a community survey was developed and promoted from July 2025 through September 2025. Staff from PDS ensured distribution with community partners and Cultural Services staff engaged with visitors to the Gardens at Spring Creek. There was a robust response of approximately 2600 surveys that were geographically distributed across the city.

Following the closure of the survey, multi-departmental staff held a Community Roundtable event at the Lincoln Center in October. Everyone that responded to the noise survey was invited to the event to receive an overview of the survey responses and participate in focus groups for topics with the strongest themes in the survey. There were 55 participants that provided additional feedback regarding: quiet hours, amplified sound and events, flexibility by location and, education and ordinance enforcement.

As noted in the April 22, 2025 Agenda Item Summary,

“the current noise ordinance is creating barriers to fully realizing the goals outlined in the FoCo Creates Master Plan, which envisions Fort Collins as a vibrant, dynamic city where arts and culture are central to the community’s identity. The restrictions on amplified sound, while intended to protect residential tranquility, limit the City’s ability to host larger, diverse cultural events—such as outdoor concerts, multicultural festivals, and community-driven performances—that bring people together and showcase the city’s rich creative talent. By adjusting the noise ordinance, we can create more opportunities for artistic expression, support local artists and cultural groups, and foster an inclusive environment where residents and visitors can experience the full range of creative activities envisioned in the FoCo Creates plan. Reevaluating these restrictions will help better align with the plan’s goal of cultivating a thriving, accessible cultural scene in Fort Collins.”

This aligns with the current Council work plan item regarding Creative/Nighttime Economy. Staff is seeking direction from Council to coordinate any future noise ordinance work with this initiative based on community feedback. This may include: higher allowable sound levels, extended quiet hours, and/or geographically defined entertainment districts.

NEXT STEPS

Dependent upon Council feedback, staff can bring forward ordinance updates for consideration on first reading in April 2026 regarding ambient noise levels.

Dependent upon Council feedback, staff can bring forward ordinance updates for consideration on first reading in April 2026 regarding downtown sound levels and quiet hours.

Dependent upon Council feedback, staff will bring forward proposed recommendations that support the Creative/Nighttime economy work plan item in alignment with the Commercial Center Work by the end of Q4/December 2026.

ATTACHMENTS / LINKS

1. Presentation