

WORK SESSION AGENDA

ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

Rupa Venkatesh, Assistant City Manager
Lori Schwarz, Community Development and Neighborhood Services Director
Eileen May, Cultural Services Director
Sergeant David Lindsay, Fort Collins Police Services

SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Sounds of the City

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to discuss different sounds in the city, its effect on the community from a diverse perspective, current compliance practices and areas of opportunity. A phased approach is proposed, prioritizing the immediate review of traffic, fireworks, and agricultural exemptions, followed by ongoing research and neighborhood engagement regarding amplified noise.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. What feedback does Council have regarding the identification of opportunity areas?
2. What feedback does Council have regarding the phased approach of updates to the municipal codes regarding noise?
3. Are there other noise related issues that Council would like more information on?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The City's noise-related municipal codes, last updated in 2008, do not reflect current urban density, traffic patterns, or the expanded availability of entertainment venues. This has resulted in increasing tension between quality-of-life expectations, the desire for vibrant urban spaces, and the preservation of neighborhood livability.

Staff is recommending a phased approach to addressing updates to the code related to traffic, fireworks, agricultural exemptions, and amplified noise. Phase 1 will focus on items that are low effort to implement but high impact as it relates to enforcement and Phase 2 will focus on amplified noise which will require further research and neighborhood outreach, if Council wants staff to pursue this item.

In addition to these focused areas, staff seeks Council guidance on additional noise and sound concerns that may necessitate code amendments, or clarification regarding the existing code's efficacy in enabling appropriate compliance and enforcement.

Phase 1 : Traffic, Fireworks, Agricultural Exemptions

Fort Collins Police Services (FCPS) staff continue to receive numerous reports from community members regarding noise occurrences throughout the City. These reports span a variety of sources, with examples including party complaints, general noise complaints, vehicle related noise complaints, and fireworks. In response, police staff have reviewed reported incidents and citations related to noise violations from 2023 to 2024. The goal was to assess how effectively current ordinances are being used in enforcement. Through this analysis, three primary areas for consideration and potential updates were identified.

The first consideration is to establish a new ordinance within the City's Traffic Code specifically addressing prohibited actions and equipment violations related to vehicle-generated noise. While the existing Municipal Code touches on some aspects of vehicle noise, it primarily focuses on residential noise occurrences. A dedicated ordinance would provide clearer, more targeted language, enabling more effective enforcement. This recommendation is driven by a noticeable increase in complaints about vehicle-related noise, including loud stereos, ineffective mufflers, engine revving, and similar concerns.

The second area involves clarifying and restructuring the current muffler ordinance within the Traffic Code. Updating the language will enhance clarity and allow police staff to apply the ordinance more effectively during enforcement efforts.

The third update includes considering the creation of a new ordinance that enables police staff to hold both property owners and tenants accountable for illegal firework use. Current ordinances present limitations in enforcement, and this new measure would help improve accountability and support more effective regulation of fireworks within city limits.

The Community Development and Neighborhood Services (CDNS) staff have also reviewed the City's noise ordinance due to recent complaints in the downtown area and adjacent neighborhoods. These have included agricultural operations as well as amplified noise concerns. Through this review, staff has identified a few areas for consideration of updates to the 2008 noise ordinance.

The first is to clarify the alignment of the existing municipal noise ordinance with Colorado statutes. Currently, the noise ordinance provides a brief reference for exceptions as 'noise from agricultural activities'. The recommended language would reflect state law and provide a definition of agriculture for consistency in application of this ordinance.

Phase 2: Amplified Noise

The second area for consideration would require additional research and community feedback. During the response to resident complaints, CDNS staff has noted that the ambient sound levels of the community now exceed the maximums provided in the current noise ordinance. This makes it difficult to enforce regulations when the baselines have already been exceeded during normal daily activities within the community.

As noted previously, the maximum decibel levels for zoning districts are being regularly exceeded in the normal activities of our community. Dependent upon City Council feedback, CDNS staff will begin taking regular sound readings, at identified locations throughout the city, to better understand the fluctuations at different times of the day as well as through different seasons. We will continue to respond to any community concerns regarding sound and closely monitor these situations to better understand correlations specific to times of day and noise-generating activities.

In addition to these readings, Staff will also begin a holistic neighborhood engagement strategy to understand the effects and opinions of amplified sound throughout the community. Amplified sound can range from small speakers at neighborhood events through live concerts at various outdoor venues across

the city. We will also research how other communities are addressing these types of sounds to determine best practices for our city.

Finally, 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.

Lastly, this data and feedback will serve as the foundation for future recommendations and potential revisions to the current noise ordinance, ensuring a balanced approach that supports both community vitality and quality of life.

Future Considerations

The following are not in any staff work plans; however, staff is aware of these potential opportunities for future considerations.

- *Automated Noise Monitoring:* Feasibility of automated noise level tracking through red-light camera technology, contingent upon future legislative changes in Colorado. Although AVIS has the technological capability, it is prohibited under Colorado state law
- *Urban Noise Sensor Deployment:* Potential for deploying city-wide noise sensors to inform data-driven urban planning and development decisions.
- *Advanced Speaker Technology:* Advancements in speaker intelligence design for noise pollution mitigation.
- *Quiet Zone and Wayside Train Horn Investments:* Continue research into quiet zone designations and potential investments in wayside train horn systems.
- *Venue Noise Mitigation:* Potential to collaborate with venue promoters on noise mitigation design considerations for future new venues.

NEXT STEPS

Dependent on Council feedback, staff can bring forward ordinance updates for consideration on first reading as early as May 6, 2025 for Phase 1 recommendations. This will allow for enforcement to begin at the start of this summer.

Dependent on Council feedback, staff can continue to research work contemplated in Phase 2 and start neighborhood outreach. Updates can be shared with Council during a Work Session in October 2025 and code updates considered in November 2025. This will allow for changes to take into effect for the next presenter series.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Presentation