



Latino Engagement Taskforce 3 of Commerce City

Comité de Involucramiento Latino 3 de Commerce City

Report and Recommendations to the City of Commerce City

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As one of Colorado's fastest growing cities, Commerce City has taken the opportunity to be a leader in building a stronger and more inclusive community. But what exactly is an inclusive community? According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, an inclusive community is characterized by some of the following:

1. Does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity
2. Works to eliminate all forms of discrimination
3. Engages all its citizens in the process of making decisions that affect their lives
4. Values diversity
5. Responds quickly to racist and other discriminating incidents

Over the last five years, Commerce City has taken many steps toward becoming a more inclusive and equitable city for the Latino community. Cultivando and the Latino Engagement Taskforce participants hope this report will support Commerce City in continuing these important endeavors.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Commerce City was home to approximately 51,000 individuals in 2014. In recent years, Commerce City has experienced a significant population increase from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and today Commerce City is one of the most diverse cities in Colorado; one of very few with a majority non-white population. Latinos comprised of 46% of the Commerce City population in 2014, but this number has increased within the past two years and Commerce City will continue to see a growth of diverse community members, particularly Latinos. The majority of families in south Commerce City are of mixed-documentation status, meaning that one or more member of the household is waiting on legal documentation status. Additionally, Adams 14 School District reports that over 50% of parents in the district have limited English proficiency, some speaking little or no English. Documentation status and language barriers, and the fear and isolation that often accompany them, are serious barriers to participation, civic engagement, health, and inclusion for those families.

To assist Commerce City in building a stronger and more inclusive community, Cultivando was contracted to develop, support, and facilitate the Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET) in December 2015. The first LET followed an eight-month process to meet with, learn, and make recommendations to City leadership. Those recommendations were submitted in July 2016, and city leadership has done a remarkable job of beginning to implement many of the proposed activities, policies, and practices suggested by LET 1.

In November 2017, Cultivando was hired to coordinate and facilitate a second LET, with 13 new members, two members who participated in LET 1, and also with strategies to include and retain the expertise and momentum of other interested LET 1 participants. The composition of LET 2 consisted of 15 Latina Commerce City community members, all of whom speak Spanish

predominantly. LET members were committed to ensuring that the process by which we formed our recommendations in this report was as important as the recommendations and the report itself. LET 2 consisted of six monthly meetings to meet with and learn from city staff. Meetings were two hours long, facilitated in Spanish, and held at the Commerce City Civic Center. Cultivando encouraged/expected regular attendance and participation of LET members.

In December 2019, Cultivando was hired to coordinate and facilitate a third LET similar to the last two cohorts. LET 3 consisted of 10 members.

We are proud of what we have accomplished and submit the following recommendations to further guide and support Commerce City's goal to build a stronger and more inclusive community. You will notice that many of the recommendations are to continue to implement and support the important changes the city has been working on since LET 1:

- Continued improvement of language access
- Cultural events including activities that celebrate Latino culture
- Continued improvement of rapport and community-building opportunities between the Latino community and the Commerce City Police Department
- Continued engagement and communication between Commerce City and the Latino community
- Affordable housing strategies to protect families at risk of displacement
- Co-development of park and community safety strategies with community members, Police Department and Parks and Recreation staff.

INTRODUCTION

With funding from the city of Commerce City, Cultivando facilitated the third Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET 3), which consisted of 10 Commerce City community members. The goal of LET 3 was to obtain constructive and solution-focused participation on how Commerce City can better engage, involve, and meaningfully serve the Latino community. Commerce City leadership, driven by City Manager Roger Tinklenberg and City Council, recognize that many Latino community members do not participate, interact, and engage in city processes and programs at rates proportional to the population. A genuine commitment from city leadership to understand how to better work with and serve the Latino community in Commerce City created and drove this project.

The goals of the LET go far beyond simply informing the Latino community about city processes or informing the city about needs or concerns of the Latino community, but rather, seek to continue to open and deepen authentic communication and mutual understanding toward building a collaborative and truly inclusive community. The recommendations also seek to build meaningful access to needed services and a solutions-focused pathway toward greater civic engagement in building a “Quality Community for a Lifetime” in Commerce City for and with all community members.

Many cities and city governments throughout the United States struggle with issues of inclusion and authentic engagement of diverse communities. Many well-documented systemic barriers and issues of cultural misunderstanding prevent and discourage participation from diverse community members. Building inclusive city processes takes time, commitment, and resources, and the recommendations put forth by LET 3 are an important step towards achieving this goal for Commerce City. Commerce City’s commitment to this work is admirable and the effort is a great example for cities across Colorado and beyond.

LET 3 members met once a month for eight months to discuss and explore various city topics that were of interest to the task force. These topics included: city organizational overview, police department experiences, victim services, and city-sponsored events. Additional topics emerged from the monthly meetings, such as water safety, park safety, stray animals, concerns with schools, etc. The objectives of the task force were to:

1. Identify issues/topics of interest to the Latino community in Commerce City
2. Document real and perceived barriers to participation in city activities and events
3. Recognize how Latinos within the city prefer to receive information
4. Determine the effectiveness of existing communication tools

The task force allowed flexibility for LET members to identify and guide the conversations and put forth the necessary recommendations to Commerce City.

WORK OF THE LATINO ENGAGEMENT TASK FORCE

The Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET 3) held its first meeting via Zoom on October 16, 2020. Subsequent meetings were held on the third Friday of each month from 9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

To assist us in gathering baseline information, pre and post surveys were distributed to LET members to address the four objectives of the task force as listed above.

Monthly meetings were facilitated by Cultivando staff and Promotoras. Cultivando and city staff met prior to each month's meeting to prepare and coordinate the logistics of the meetings (agendas, calls, areas of improvement, etc). Meeting agendas allowed flexibility for different topics identified by LET 3 members. As with any authentic and meaningful community outreach, inviting community members to lead the monthly conversations was highly important to ensure Cultivando captured the stories and experiences that were shared.

Overviews of each meeting are highlighted below, with general recommendations following concrete and detailed recommendations and handouts that were shared with members.

MONTHLY LET MEETING SUMMARIES

Meeting #1

October 16, 2020

Topic: Introduction to LET | Identification of Topics of Interests

Special Guests: Interim City Manager Roger Tinklenberg

Total Number of LET Attendees: 15

Key Takeaways:

- Topics of Interest for future meetings
 - Active Adult Services in Spanish
 - How to keep the city clean (Code Enforcement)
 - Additional family events
 - CCPD updates on crime
 - How the city is handling homelessness
 - Youth projects with the city
 - Exploring new communication tools
 - The relationship between the city and school districts (i.e. Adams 14)
 - Street sweeping and road maintenance (Public Works)

Feedback:

- More education and information regarding the trash services in the city.
- Increase bilingual access to information via the web (permits/applications), social media, via phone, etc.
- Services at the Active Adult Center are limited and there needs to be bilingual programming and representative staff member.

- Work with the homeless population to address their needs. Ensure that spaces where the homeless camp are safe for all residents.
- Greater cleaning of streets, and greater improvements. (Around Olive Street and 56th Avenue, around Rose Hill and other around small businesses).
 - Love the new playground in bilingual Spanish. This should be the standard for all parks.

Summary:

Interim City Manager Roger Tinklenberg welcomed the committee and members had the opportunity to discuss future meeting topics. Staff liaison will then work to get a presenter from the respective department for committee members to learn more about their suggested topics.

Meeting #2

November 20, 2020

Topic: Code Enforcement

Special Guests: Code Enforcement Supervisor Paula Baker

Total Number of LET Attendees: 12

Key Takeaways:

- Committee members had the opportunity to hear from Paula Baker from Code Enforcement and had some time for Q&A.

Feedback:

- Add trees in shrubs in old Commerce City to help transition in the new development of the Mile High Greyhound Park.
- Partner with school districts to help educate parents on codes.
- Creation of programs that are easy to navigate via the web and apps.

Summary:

Code Enforcement Supervisor Paula Baker presented on a wide range of code enforcement topics. Overall, the committee felt that there was an overload of information presented as most of it was new to many. Although the presentation felt like a lot of information to take in, it was useful and important information to have. Committee members expressed interest in a future presentation with more specifics and more opportunity for Q&A.

Meeting #3

January 15, 2021

Topic: CDBG Resources/Consolidated Plan feedback

Special Guests: CDBG Coordinator Cheryl Steinberg and Mosaic representatives

Total Number of LET Attendees: 15

Key Takeaways:

- Housing costs in the city are too high

Feedback:

- Need more resources for homeless, mental health, seniors
- Needed in Commerce City: plants, trees, pocket parks
- Vouchers for public transportation are needed
- Would like to see more collaboration between the city and the local school districts

- Would like to see vocational schools in the city
- Programming and communications should reassure undocumented community that they could apply for funds/programs regardless of their status. Program funds that would help the community would include daycare, house renovations, and rental assistance.

Summary:

The interpretation and translation of documents should be adapted to a cultural and relatable language that the community can understand. Many times, these opportunities to interact with city representatives are a first for Latino community members and the information should be relevant and informative.

Meeting #4

Feb. 19, 2021

Topic: City Clerk – City Council Meetings 101

Special Guests: City Clerk Dylan Gibson

Total Number of LET Attendees: 14

Key Takeaways:

- City Clerk Dylan Gibson provided an overview on city council 101 meetings and shed light on boards and commissions.

Feedback and Questions:

- When will the city offer passports again (delayed due to COVID)?
- What type of citizen communication come through at city council meetings?
- What is the registration process to speak at city council meetings?
- What are the requirements to participate in boards and commissions?
 - Does the participant need to be a resident?
 - Is there interpretation?
- High interest in Civic Academy with interpretation.
- All Channel 8 broadcast meetings should have Spanish subtitles.

Summary:

Overall, LET members expressed interest in continuing to engage with the city and to participate in various programs/boards, and commissions, but are hesitant to do so with the lack of interpretation services offered.

Meeting #5

March. 19, 2021

Topic: City involvement with school districts

Special Guests: Councilman José Guardiola

Total Number of LET Attendees: 12

Key Takeaways:

- Attendees got an overview on how the school districts are separate entities than the local government.

Feedback:

- Leadership programs for young people to get involved in the city.

- Improve the relationship and communication of parents who monitor the welfare of students with the police. Awareness programs or conversations: (i.e. people speeding through school areas, etc.).
- Identify the needs of students.
- Involvement initiatives with parents of students.

Summary:

Overall, committee members expressed having a better understanding of the relationship between the school district and the city. Although the city does not dictate school districts, LET members would like to be more involved and serve as liaisons between community members and the schools.

Meeting #6

April 16, 2021

Topic: Commerce City Police Department

Special Guests: Commander McCoy, Officer Hernandez, Officer Morales and Cindy De Santiago

Total Number of LET Attendees: 12

Key Takeaways:

This meeting consisted of a short presentation by the Police Department followed by Q&A from LET members. All of the LET members were very content with the abundance of information, bilingual police officers present at the meeting, and the fact that there was plenty of time for group discussion. Police Department staff present at the meeting answered all questions provided below.

Feedback and Questions:

- Has COVID decreased reporting/crime calls?
- Has crime in the south end of the city gone up?
- Why does the police sometimes take so long to respond?
- How should community members make a report in person?
- What's the difference between making a report or committing a crime?
- What's the city's noise ordinance?
- What to do if a homeless person attacks a resident?
- How to participate in the neighborhood watch program? Is it bilingual?
- Vehicle theft
- Information regarding minor citations

Summary:

LET committee members were able to get their community and personal questions answered. City staff followed-up with Cultivando staff with additional information. The committee recommended the creation of bilingual programs for Latino parents and youth with relevance to prevention of illegal use and consumption of marijuana and the laws related to it.

Meeting #7

May 21, 2021

Topic: Commerce City Parks and Recreation

Special Guests: Marty Walsh, Elizabeth Belton, Elia Ramirez-Barraza, Leslie Ventura-Enriquez, Brandon Castaneda

Total Number of LET Attendees: 12

Key Takeaways:

- Information on current programs for kids, adults and youth
- Registration Process
- Scholarship opportunities to offset costs
- Eagle Pointe facility tour
- Community access to community rooms

Feedback and Questions:

- Requests for more access to bilingual staff. This includes not just staff at the front desks, but trainers, fitness class teachers, program teachers, and the active adult center.

Summary:

The LET committee had an in-person meeting at Eagle Pointe Recreation Center in order to give participants a tour. Committee members were also given general information, program information, and services offered by the city's parks and recreation department.

Meeting #8

June 18, 2021

Topic: Building Safety and Code Enforcement

Special Guests: Monique Ramirez, Permit Technician

Total Number of LET Attendees: 12

Meeting Key Takeaways:

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Feedback and Questions:

- When making updates to your house, which updates require permits?
- How to make anonymous reports for neighbors not following code enforcement rules.
- How is the city communicating this information out to the community?

Summary:

Monique Ramirez was able to; provide information in Spanish regarding the permitting process, explain the different code enforcement methods, and answer any personal or community questions. Committee members in general expressed a huge lack of knowledge regarding the permitting process. Many updates to the property require a permit, which homeowners did not know. There is a lot of uncertainty as to what requires a permit and how to access this information.

CONCLUSION

The Latino Engagement Taskforce cohort #3 was different from any of the others. Prior task force groups typically met in person and had face-to-face interaction. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, LET 3 was forced to meet virtually. This created many barriers and challenges for the community members who wanted to participate. Overall, the group demonstrated resilience and commitment to the task force.

At the end of almost every monthly presentation, the need for more bilingual resources was expressed. It was suggested that each city department develop internal strategies with its staff to improve their accessibility to the Latino community. Another recommendation was that all city staff should be intentional in their stated commitment to serving all Spanish-speaking community members and that that responsibility not rest solely on the bilingual staff. All those who represent the city should be aware that perhaps this is the first time a member of the Latino community has interacted with city employees, representatives, and departments. They should understand that it will be important to create two-way communication that can lead to an environment of trust where there is room for reflection, questions, and suggestions.

Cultivando hopes to continue their relationship with the city and to see more follow-up on the reports and recommendations that the three LET cohorts have made. This can be a great way to celebrate the success of the task force and show the community that there is continued communication between the Latino community and the City.