

**City of Commerce City
City Council Retreat
March 13 and 14, 2026
Summit Club - Dick's Sporting Goods Park
Meeting Summary -FINAL**

ATTENDANCE

Council members: Steve Douglas, Charles Dukes, Craig Kim, José Guardiola, Susan Noble, Rocky Teter, Stefanie Trujillo, Joanna Sandoval, Lori Young

City Staff: Jason Dennison, Dylan Gibson, Jim Tolbert, Courtney Brown, Sheryl Carstens, Jason R. Rogers, Lee Zerzecki

Facilitation Team: Heather Bergman, Nadia Janis

ACTION ITEMS

City Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a reporting schedule for enforcement and crime data and provide updates to Council. • Develop a long-term financial plan for community wellbeing programs. • Update Council working agreements through the Rules and Procedures Committee and bring revisions to Council for review.
City Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and provide direction on refined strategic plan goals, including actions, timelines, and measures of success. • Provide direction on alignment between strategic plan priorities and future budget decisions. • Review and consider updates to Council working agreements. • Discuss and vote on proposed budget and CIP amendments brought forward by staff, consistent with the agreed-upon process.

MEETING CONTEXT

The Commerce City Council met for a multi-day retreat to align its priorities and set direction for the City's work to move forward. The retreat focused on connecting visioning discussions to budget priorities and updating the strategic plan to reflect Council's current direction. Over the course of the retreat, Council identified updated strategic plan goals and provided initial direction to staff to further define actions, timelines, and measures of success.

EMERGENETICS

Council members completed an Emergenetics assessment prior to the retreat and reviewed individual and group profiles during the session. Council members discussed how behavioral attributes and thinking patterns influence communication, participation, and decision-making. The discussion is summarized below.

Behavioral Attributes: Overview

- **Expressiveness** shapes how individuals participate in group discussions. More expressive individuals tend to share ideas openly and may interpret silence as agreement. Less expressive individuals often process information internally before speaking.
- Differences in **assertiveness** influence how perspectives are communicated and how quickly discussions move. More assertive individuals tend to advocate directly for positions and push toward decisions. Less assertive individuals may need additional time to process and respond.
- Differences in **flexibility** affect expectations around process and decision-making. Higher flexibility can lead to longer discussions and a desire for additional information. Lower flexibility may lead to a preference for moving forward once direction is set.

Behavioral Attributes: Applications to Council Discussions

Council members discussed how these behavioral attributes influence their collaboration with one another.

- It is important to be mindful of how behaviors are perceived and avoid assumptions about intent.
- Council could design conversations to balance participation so that more expressive or assertive voices do not disproportionately influence outcomes. Ideas for strengthening participation include more explicitly asking all Councilmembers for input and providing advance notice when individuals are expected to contribute.

Behavioral Attributes: Implications for Community Engagement

Council members discussed how the dynamics of behavioral attributes apply to public engagement.

- Individuals who participate in public comment may be more expressive and assertive than other residents. Thus, their voices may not represent the full range of community perspectives.
- Council could offer multiple types of engagement to better reach individuals with different communication styles and preferences.

Thinking Preferences: Overview

- **Analytical thinking** focuses on data, evidence, and measurable outcomes. A preference for analytical thinking is often characterized by asking detailed questions about data sources, analysis methods, and how conclusions are reached.
- **Structural thinking** focuses on the details surrounding implementation, including processes, timelines, and defined roles. Structural thinking often involves considering how to move ideas from concept to execution and identifying operational challenges.
- **Social thinking** focuses on how decisions affect people, such as residents, stakeholders, and community members. Social thinking could look like considering community perspectives and impacts when evaluating policies and programs.
- **Conceptual thinking** focuses on long-term vision, ideas, and future opportunities. Conceptual thinking often includes connecting ideas across topics and exploring broader implications of decisions.

Thinking Preferences: Implications for Council Dynamics and Communication Council members discussed how thinking preferences can impact their dynamics, decision-making, and communication.

- Different thinking preferences influence communication styles and expectations. Differences in thinking styles can lead to misinterpretation if not clearly understood. Awareness of one another's thinking preferences could improve Council's collaboration.
- It is important to balance the different thinking preferences in decision-making to ensure a variety of factors, including data, process, people, and long-term vision, are considered.

COUNCILMEMBER VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CITY

Each Council member shared their individual visions for the future of Commerce City, spanning several overlapping themes. Council then reflected on their visions and discussed areas of alignment and divergence.

Council member Visions by Theme

Council members' visions are organized by theme in the sections below.

Community Identity, Belonging, and Culture

Council members described a vision of Commerce City as a welcoming, connected, and culturally vibrant community. Their visions included:

- A welcoming community with a strong sense of belonging
- A cohesive and collaborative community that celebrates diversity
- An open-minded culture with a focus on connection and engagement
- Residents who feel seen, heard, and valued
- A multi-generational community with long-term roots and returning families
- A community where residents choose to stay long-term
- Nonprofits that are invested in, valued, and engaged with the community
- Trusting relationships between City Council, staff, businesses, residents, and future community members
- Engaged citizens who have a strong understanding of the democratic process

Safety and Public Safety

Council members described safety as a foundational condition across the community. Their visions included:

- Safe neighborhoods, parks, and public spaces
- A strong and fully staffed police department
- Reduced rates of crime and fatalities
- Transparent reporting and communication around incidents
- Infrastructure designed for safety, including sidewalks and lighting
- Safe routes to school
- Effective emergency communication systems
- Safety across populations, including families, children, and seniors

Economic Development and Local Economy

Council members described economic development as important to the community's long-term sustainability. Their visions included:

- Retail development that meets daily needs within the city
- Support for both small businesses and larger employers
- Increase targeted retail sectors to meet sales tax demand
- Greater access to restaurants, grocery stores, and local services
- Workforce development efforts that fuel economic growth
- Job creation within the city
- A diverse industry base, including technology, construction, and retail
- Commerce City as a regional economic hub
- Opportunities for residents to live, work, and access services locally

Housing and Growth

Council members described housing and growth as areas requiring flexibility and balance. Their visions included:

- A range of housing types across price points
- Housing affordability and accessibility
- Multi-generational housing options
- A balance between single-family and higher-density development
- Thoughtful growth aligned with community needs
- Preservation of community character alongside development

- Housing choice rather than prescriptive development
- Development that is not exclusionary
- Alignment between housing and transportation access

Infrastructure, Transportation, and Connectivity

Council members described infrastructure and connectivity as critical to safety, access, and quality of life. Their visions included:

- High-quality roads with ongoing maintenance
- Addressing potholes and road conditions
- Wide, accessible, and connected sidewalks
- Safe routes to school and pedestrian safety
- Improved traffic signals, lighting, and flow management
- Minimal speeding
- Connectivity within neighborhoods and across the city
- Regional connections and coordination with other jurisdictions
- Transportation to improve access to jobs, services, and amenities

Parks, Recreation, and Community Amenities

Council members described parks, recreation, and community amenities as essential to quality of life. Their visions included:

- High-quality parks and recreational spaces
- Gathering spaces for play and community interaction
- Trails and outdoor connectivity
- Recreation centers and programming
- Cultural centers and arts spaces
- Senior services and additional facilities in the northern part of Commerce City
- Tourism and community activation
- Walkability and access to amenities

Environmental Conditions and Community Wellbeing

Council members described environmental conditions as part of overall community wellbeing. Their visions included:

- Air quality and pollution reduction
- Water systems, including basins, outfalls, and drainage
- Tree health, planting programs, and urban canopy
- Heat island mitigation
- Water-wise practices, such as xeriscaping and irrigation
- Partnerships with industry to address environmental impacts

History, Identity, and Future Vision

Council members described Commerce City's history and identity as important foundations for future growth. Their visions included:

- Preservation and celebration of local history
- A shared identity across the north and south areas of the city
- Activation of key assets such as the Rocky Mountain Arsenal
- Balance between honoring history and planning for the future

Governance, Transparency, and Council Culture

Council members described governance and working relationships as critical to effective leadership. Their visions included:

- Transparency in government and decision-making
- Trust between Council, staff, and the community
- Strong Council cohesion and collaboration
- Accountability between Council and staff
- Clear and consistent meeting policies and processes
- Civic education and public understanding of decisions

Education and Workforce Development

Council members described education and workforce development as long-term investments in the community. Their visions included:

- High-quality schools
- Education across all ages
- Higher education and community college opportunities
- Workforce development and career pathways

Council Discussion and Clarification of Ideas

Council identified and discussed several terms and ideas that needed clarification. Where applicable, questions are summarized in italics, followed by the corresponding response. The discussion is summarized below.

Economic Development

- The term “economic development” can refer to both retail and service-based development. Some references to economic development were intended to focus on retail uses rather than the broader industry.
- North Commerce City lacks access to restaurants and everyday services, which requires residents to leave the city to meet basic needs.
- Development that serves existing residents and allows people to access goods and services within their community is important.

Retail Industry and Sales Tax Demand

Residents leave Commerce City to purchase goods and services, resulting in missed opportunities to maximize sales tax revenue. A retail demand study has been completed, and sales tax surplus, equilibrium, and deficiency are tracked by industry and updated quarterly.

Housing Terminology

What do Council members mean by “housing” and “housing for a lifetime”?

Housing includes a range of options that address different resident needs and preferences, such as single-family housing, higher-density development, and more affordable options. Councilmembers discussed community pushback related to housing types and changes in neighborhood character.

Development patterns and community hubs can support residents' ability to stay in the community over time. A “menu” of housing options allows for flexibility rather than a single approach. Some residents may not intend to stay long-term. Housing decisions are influenced by transportation and access.

Community Wellbeing Terminology

Council members preferred the term “environmental wellbeing” over “environmental safety” to reflect a broader approach.

Council Reflections on Visions for the Future of the City

Council members reflected on the vision discussion and identified areas of alignment and differences across their perspectives. The discussion is summarized below.

Areas of Convergence

Council members identified several areas where their visions aligned. These areas of convergence included:

- Safety across the community, including public safety, safe infrastructure, and safe routes to school
- Support for families, children, and multi-generational households
- Transparency and clear communication across the organization
- High-quality infrastructure, including roads and transportation systems
- Efforts to strengthen economic development, particularly retail and workforce development
- Housing that supports residents across different life stages.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Council members identified several concepts that apply across multiple priority areas, including:

- Connectivity within neighborhoods, across the city, and to regional systems
- Beautification, including trash, tree health, and corridors
- Partnerships with nonprofits, industry, developers, and other jurisdictions

Systems-Level Considerations

Council members discussed how different visions intersect and influence one another.

- Infrastructure, transportation, and safety are closely linked and best considered together.
- Housing, economic development, and transportation are closely related and, therefore, require coordinated planning.
- Community amenities, including parks and recreation, support both economic development and community wellbeing.

BUDGET PRIORITIZATION

Council reviewed budget priorities and discussed how funding decisions align with the vision themes and strategic direction identified during the retreat. The discussion is summarized below.

Staff Framing: Budget and Financial Context

Staff provided additional context on how Council visions may translate into funding decisions and implementation. Their comments are summarized below.

- Some ideas discussed do not fall within discrete budget categories and may be more appropriately addressed through broader planning efforts.
- Key revenue sources include property tax and sales tax, with a need to consider revenue diversification while remaining competitive.
- Workforce development is a long-term strategy, as a more educated and trained workforce supports retail growth and housing stability.
- Primary employment refers to the creation of goods or services that are exported outside the city, including manufacturing.
- Redevelopment includes urban renewal and reinvestment in existing areas.

- The unassigned fund lacks clear Council direction regarding its use and is typically used for personnel costs and capital development.
- An informal threshold is used to avoid over-utilization of the unassigned fund, but no formal policy is currently in place.

Budget Priority Survey

Councilmembers completed an online survey prior to the Day 2 session to rank major budget categories. Council members ranked the following budget categories in order of priority:

1. Safety (Northern Range Substation)
2. Retail
3. Derby
4. Redevelopment
5. Workforce Development
6. Life Safety Equipment Enhancement
7. Roads
8. Primary Employment

Interpretation of Survey Results

The survey results prompted clarification of category definitions and how rankings should be interpreted. This discussion is summarized below.

- Survey results reflect budget priorities rather than policy priorities.
- Derby and redevelopment are closely related and may be considered together.
- Lower-ranked items may reflect differences in how categories were defined or understood.

Council clarified the following category definitions:

- Deferred pavement maintenance refers to ongoing road repair and maintenance.
- Concrete flatwork refers to curbs and sidewalks.
- A new program provides a 50 percent subsidy to assist homeowners with sidewalk improvements.
- Additional infrastructure elements include guardrails and medians.

Budget Structure and Funding Context

Staff provided context to connect priority areas to funding structures and implementation. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and general fund are interconnected and are considered together in planning and decision-making.
- Capital investments are defined as projects exceeding \$50,000, including roads, amenities, and trailheads.
- Current CIP discussions focus on the built environment or large programmatic undertakings (e.g. Comprehensive Plan, Master Transportation Plan, etc.).
- Future discussions will include reviewing planned projects and evaluating alignment with identified priorities.
- Evaluation of existing investments will determine whether additional funding or scope adjustments are needed.
- Policy priorities are incorporated into operational planning and staffing considerations.

Implementation Considerations

Staff highlighted implementation constraints and operational realities in relation to priority areas. Their comments are summarized below.

Maintenance Responsibilities and Jurisdiction

- A hotshot crew supports trash pickup on city-owned roadways. Currently four FTEs with two additional to be hired in 2026.
- Maintenance responsibilities do not extend to highways or interstates.
- Coordination with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) limits the City's ability to address maintenance beyond its jurisdiction.
- Staff are pursuing an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with CDOT to expand the City's ability to take on additional maintenance responsibilities.

Real and Perceived Roadway Maintenance Work Quality

- Contractor performance varies across projects.
- Engineering standards prioritize function and durability over subjective visual outcomes.
- Long-term performance of repairs remains a primary consideration.

IMPLEMENTATION, GOVERNANCE, AND BUDGET PROCESSES

Council discussed how strategic priorities will be implemented, how decisions will be made, and how the City will maintain alignment between the strategic plan and budget over time. The discussion is summarized below.

Implementation and Strategic Planning Approach

Council members discussed how strategic priorities will be translated into action. Key elements included:

- Defining specific actions for each priority area, rather than relying on high-level themes
- A one-year outlook that is revisited annually and used to report on completed work
- A transparent system for reporting progress and completed projects, including continued use of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Dashboard to track capital project work
- Strategic planning that includes specific timelines and benchmarking

Flexibility and Emergent Decision-Making

Councilmembers discussed how emergent situations are handled and the need for flexibility in decision-making. Key elements included:

- Allowing flexibility when emergent situations require changes to planned work
- Expressed support of the current process, where staff bring forward new information or changing conditions, and Council evaluates and responds, including the use of study sessions to review information and discuss options
- A more consistent process for handling emergent issues
- Maintaining staff's ability to respond to changing conditions

Budget Discipline and Capital Planning

The group outlined how budget decisions and capital planning will be approached to maintain alignment with strategic priorities.

- Budget decisions align with the adopted budget and strategic plan unless a change becomes necessary.
- Staff may shift resources within approved budget components.
- All funds not appropriated at the time of budget adoption will be presented to City Council for additional appropriation through a budget ordinance as needs arise throughout the year.
- Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects are guided by goals aligned with Council priorities.
- Staff develop five-year plans for CIP projects to guide sequencing and implementation.

- Staff bring forward proposed changes to CIP projects with supporting rationale, and Council votes to approve or reject those changes.

Budget Process Agreement

Council established a shared approach for how budget decisions and changes will be made moving forward. Their agreement is summarized below.

- Council follows the adopted budget and strategic plan unless a need for change is identified.
- The City Manager’s Office will bring forward proposed changes and specify the reason for the change.
- Council will discuss proposed changes and vote to approve or reject them.
- Staff may shift resources within approved budget components, while funds not appropriated at the time of budget adoption require Council approval.
- Council should strive to maintain alignment with adopted plans and avoid frequent or incremental changes outside of this process.

Alignment with Master Plans

Council discussed how existing master plans inform budgeting and implementation decisions.

- Existing master plans guide the development of budget proposals.
- Some master plans have not been revisited or implemented according to their timelines.
- Master plans may be broken into year-by-year actions to support implementation.
- Budget proposals are expected to demonstrate alignment with existing master plans.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT AND GOAL DEVELOPMENT

Council aligned vision themes and budget priorities with updated strategic plan goals. They focused on identifying desired outcomes, refining goal language, and defining what success and implementation will look like over time. The discussion is summarized in the sections below.

Updated Strategic Plan Goals

Council identified the following updated strategic plan goals that reflect their shared priorities and will serve as the foundation for the updated strategic plan. Their discussion on each goal and the associated direction to staff is summarized in the sections below.

Strategic Plan Goals:

- Economic Investment
- Public Safety
- Health and Wellbeing
- Housing
- Infrastructure and Transportation
- Transparent, Effective, and Accountable Government

Economic Investment

- Economic development includes business support, promoting development opportunities, and the use of incentive policies.
- Trade shows and direct business engagement are tools to attract and inform potential development.
- Workforce development, retail development, and redevelopment are interconnected.
- Primary employment aligns with economic development and fits within the same category.
- Developer partnerships and industry feedback play a key role in influencing development decisions.

- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**
 - Activate the Workforce Advisory Council and provide regular updates to Council.
 - Continue implementation of the Derby plan and provide updates aligned with 2027 benchmarking.
 - Convene quarterly roundtable meetings with developers and industry partners.
 - Evaluate and refine impact fee structures to support development while maintaining competitiveness.

Public Safety

- The Northern Range substation is a key public safety investment.
- Safe streets efforts include traffic calming, enforcement, and infrastructure improvements.
- Enforcement, response time, and reporting data are key areas of focus.
- Staffing levels, retention, and operational capacity remain ongoing challenges.
- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**
 - Develop a reporting schedule for enforcement and crime data and provide updates to Council.
 - Conduct a public safety audit, including review of policing practices and Flock systems.
 - Provide updates on police staffing, retention, and improvement efforts.
 - Advance implementation of the Northern Range substation.

Health and Wellbeing

- The Community Action Program and the City’s role include supporting services related to education, homelessness, and food access.
- Partnerships with major industry, including Suncor and trucking companies, support community health and wellbeing.
- Environmental conditions include tree canopy and related infrastructure such as irrigation.
- Long-term sustainability of community wellbeing programs remains a concern, particularly due to reliance on federal funding.
- The role of local government in providing and funding these services remains an ongoing consideration.
- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**
 - Continue supporting community wellbeing programs and provide quarterly updates on services, including education, homelessness, and food access.
 - Develop a long-term financial plan for community wellbeing programs and identify potential partnerships.
 - Share the urban canopy study with Council and identify next steps, including irrigation considerations.
 - Establish quarterly meetings with major industry partners, including Suncor and trucking companies, to coordinate on community health and environmental issues.

Housing

- Redevelopment in southern areas includes reinvestment in existing neighborhoods.
- Affordable and attainable housing options are needed across the community.
- Long-term residency and generational housing are desired outcomes.
- Displacement and gentrification remain concerns.
- Limitations on local authority related to housing finance and policy tools affect available approaches.
- Partnerships with developers and housing entities support housing outcomes.
- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**

- Develop a housing needs implementation plan by the end of 2027, building on the existing housing needs assessment.
- Explore partnerships to support a range of housing types, including affordable and attainable housing.
- Incorporate redevelopment and infill development into housing planning efforts.
- Identify strategies to support long-term residency and minimize displacement.

Infrastructure and Transportation

- Sidewalks, street lighting, and road conditions are key infrastructure priorities.
- Safe roads and traffic safety remain ongoing priorities, including implementation of safety initiatives.
- Micro-transit and mobility options are potential transportation strategies.
- The City app is used to track maintenance requests and service delivery.
- Potential City ownership of street lighting is under consideration.
- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**
 - Track and report resolutions of maintenance complaints submitted through AccessC3.
 - Continue implementation of safety action plan initiatives, including Phase 2 items.
 - Bring the micro-transit study to Council with recommendations.

Transparent, Effective, and Accountable Government

- Transparency and accountability are within Council’s control and are distinct from broader concepts of trust.
- Communication with the public and civic engagement remain areas for improvement.
- Engagement of a broader range of community members, beyond those already involved, is needed.
- Council communication and meeting effectiveness require improvement.
- Updates to policies, including Council working agreements and governance practices, are under consideration.
- **Council Agreement on Implementation Actions:**
 - Update Council working agreements through the Rules and Procedures Committee and bring updates to Council.
 - Design engagement approaches that prioritize listening and data-informed decision-making.
 - Expand communication efforts to share goals, progress, and outcomes across multiple platforms.
 - Increase public awareness of City processes and decision-making.
 - Engage boards and commissions to support communication and outreach efforts.

History (Not Identified as a Strategic Goal)

History was not identified as a strategic goal but was discussed as a community value and an important part of the City’s identity. The discussion is summarized below.

- History is a shared value across the community.
- The historical society and museum play a role in preserving and sharing local history.
- Long-term sustainability of history-related efforts remains a concern.
- Maintaining history as a priority in future planning efforts is an ongoing consideration.
- Incorporating history into the strategic plan and partnering with existing organizations are potential approaches.

NEXT STEPS

Council and staff outlined the next phase of work to refine the strategic plan, align budget and capital planning, and move toward implementation. The next steps are summarized below.

Strategic Plan Refinement

Staff will return to Council with refined strategic priorities, including updated goal language, more specific actions, and clearer definitions of success tied to each goal. This next phase will build on the working session and further define implementation, including timelines and benchmarking. Council will review and provide direction on these materials at upcoming meetings.

Budget and Capital Planning Alignment

Following refinement of the strategic plan, staff will align budget development and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) planning with the identified priorities. This will include reviewing existing projects, identifying gaps, and determining where additional funding or scope adjustments may be needed. Staff will bring forward recommendations for Council review and decision-making.

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