



**ANNUAL
CONFERENCE**
2025 BRECKENRIDGE

Civic Assembly

Community-Led Problem Solving

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COLORADO
MUNICIPAL
LEAGUE

Agenda



AN INTRODUCTION TO
CIVIC ASSEMBLIES



CITY OF FORT
COLLINS CASE



Q&A



The Context



A Problem of

Representation

**We don't see ourselves
in our political system.**



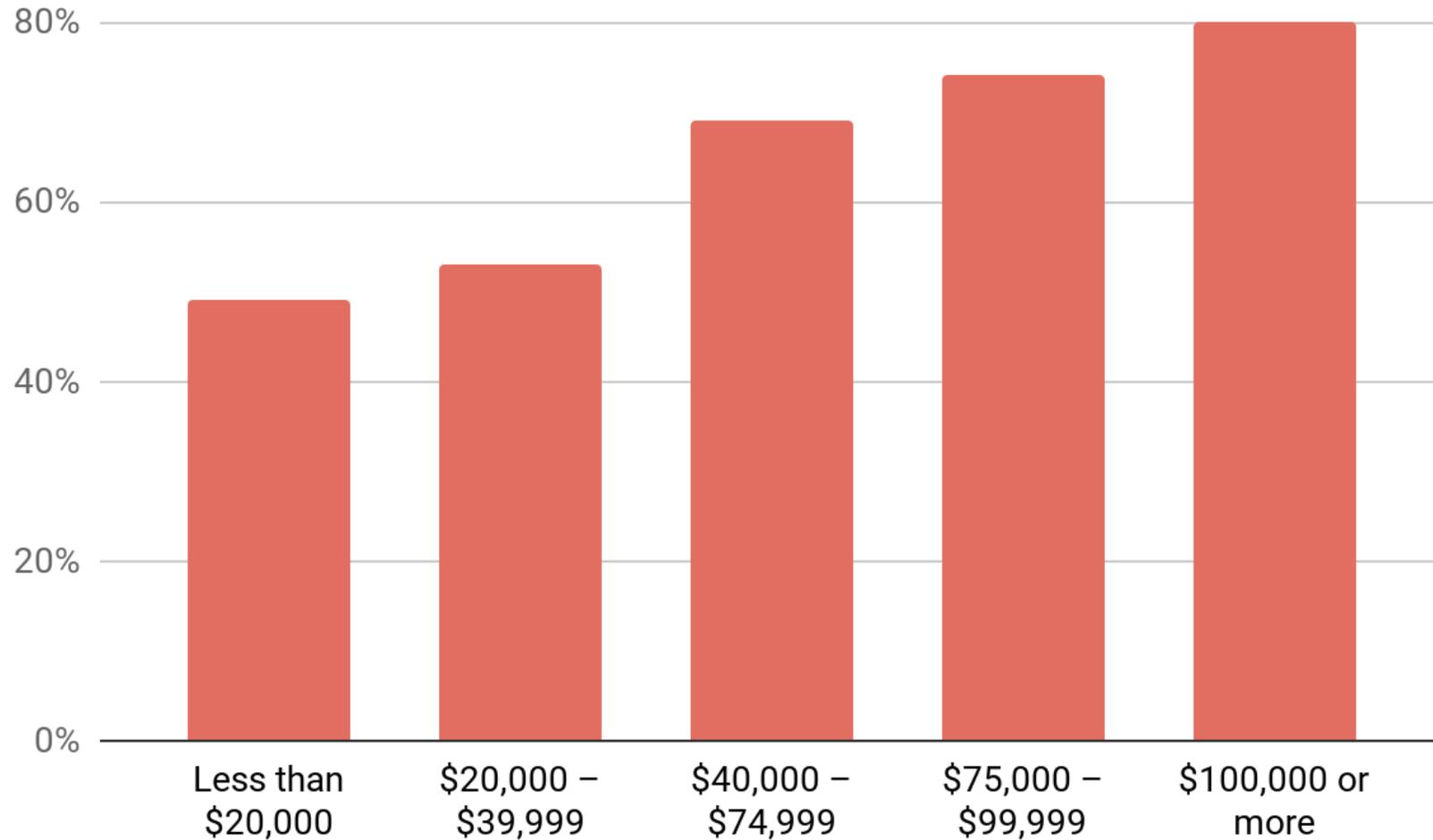


**We depend almost entirely on
self-selected volunteerism –
open in theory,
but restricted in practice.**



Participation in Civic Activities by Income

(US adults who took part in at least one civic/political activity in the past 12 months)



**Blame the individuals,
blame the systems –
in the end, it doesn't matter.
The outcome is the same:
most people aren't in it.**





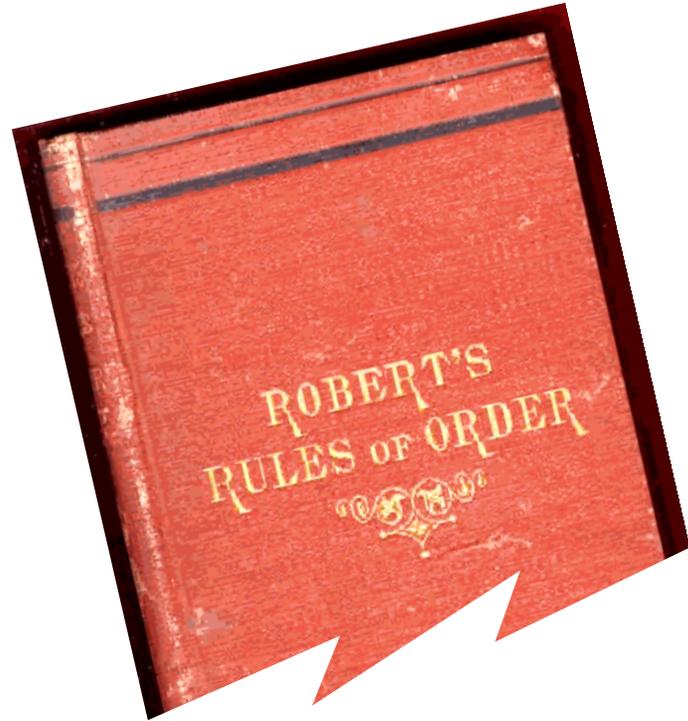
A Problem of
Process

**We don't see a system
that's built for us.**

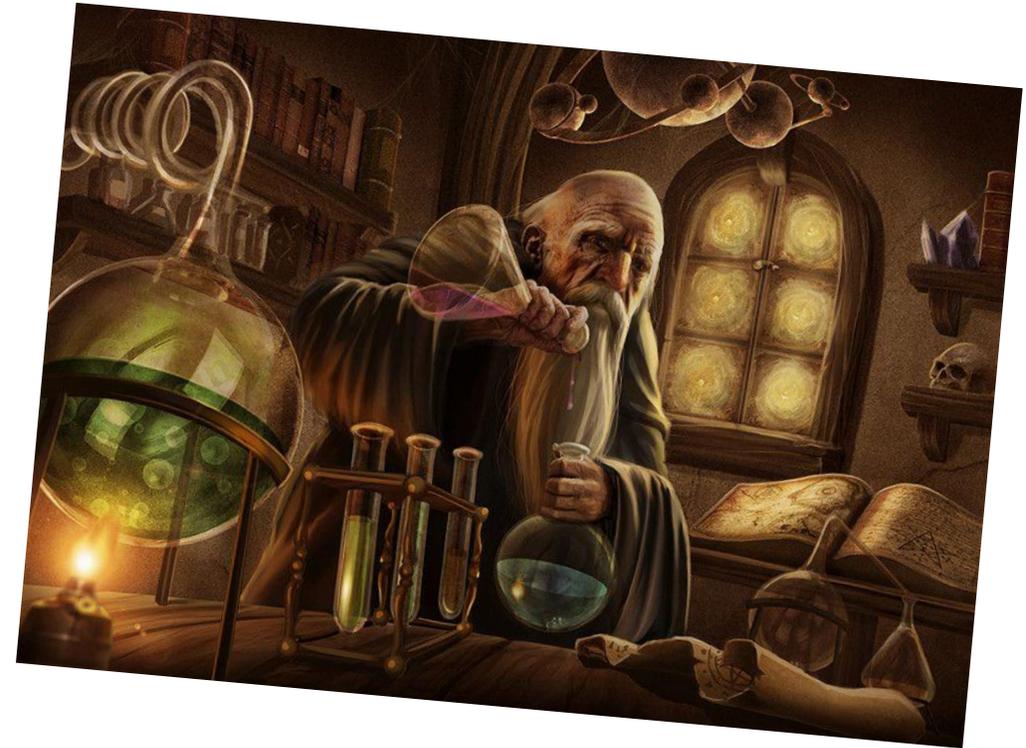


**We don't see public decision making
as something we can all do.**

It seems to require . . .



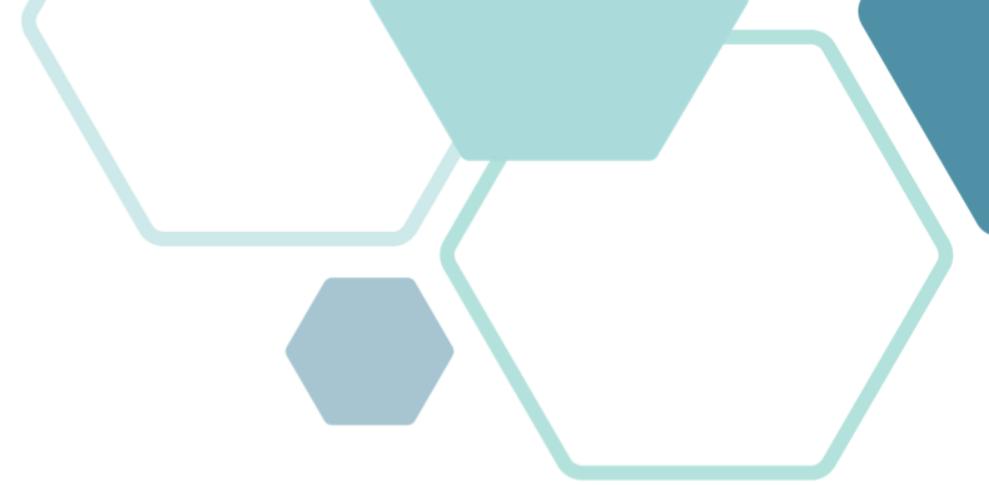
Comfort with rigid procedures



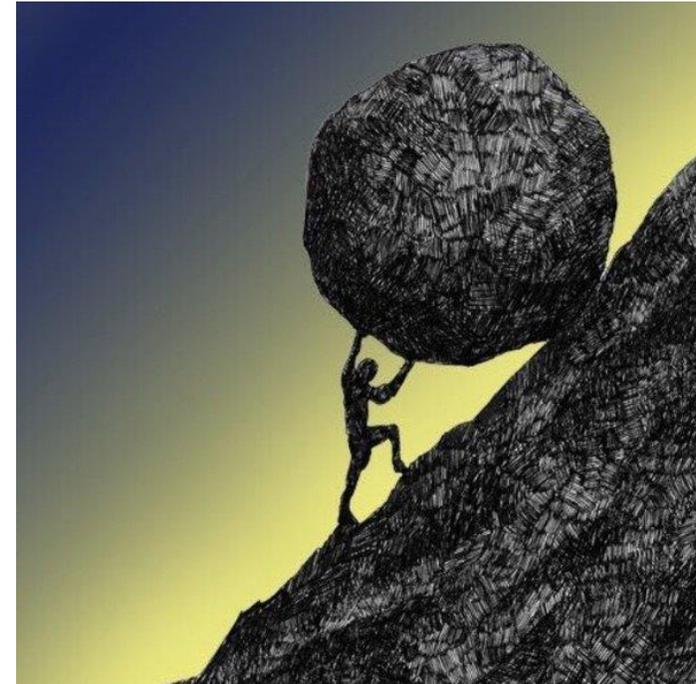
Special knowledge

And most of us don't see it as something we even *want* to do.

It seems to involve . . .



Arguing, not collaboration



Lots of work, not much impact



The Result

Very few of us will *ever* deeply participate in *any* public policy decision that affects us at *any* point in our lives.





**No surprise –
this has consequences.**



**This is a monumental risk for our democracy,
locally and beyond.**





**We need public ownership of
public policy, not just involvement.**

**A democracy where
we are *all* policymakers.**





A New Approach to Democracy

Civic Assemblies

(a.k.a., Citizens' Assemblies, Policy Juries)

Civic Assemblies Are Different

WHO



Democratic Lottery

draws out brand new voices, creates a unique microcosm of the public & reduces barriers to participating fully

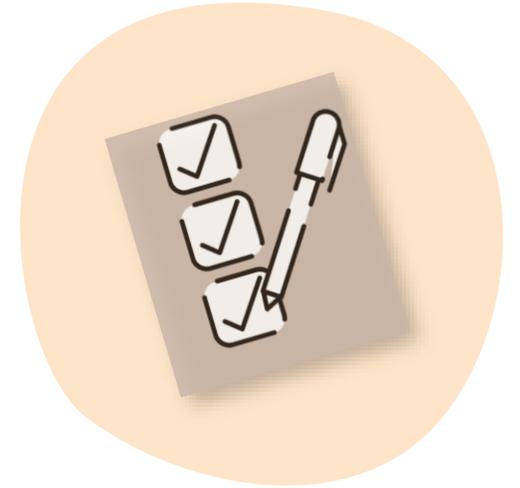
WHAT



In-Depth Deliberation

changes policymaking itself, prioritizing substantial time, broad information, personal support, Delegate power & a new political architecture that fosters collaboration

HOW



Decisions by

Supermajority help find creative common ground, while respecting difference & never forcing consensus



Who's in the Room

The Democratic Lottery

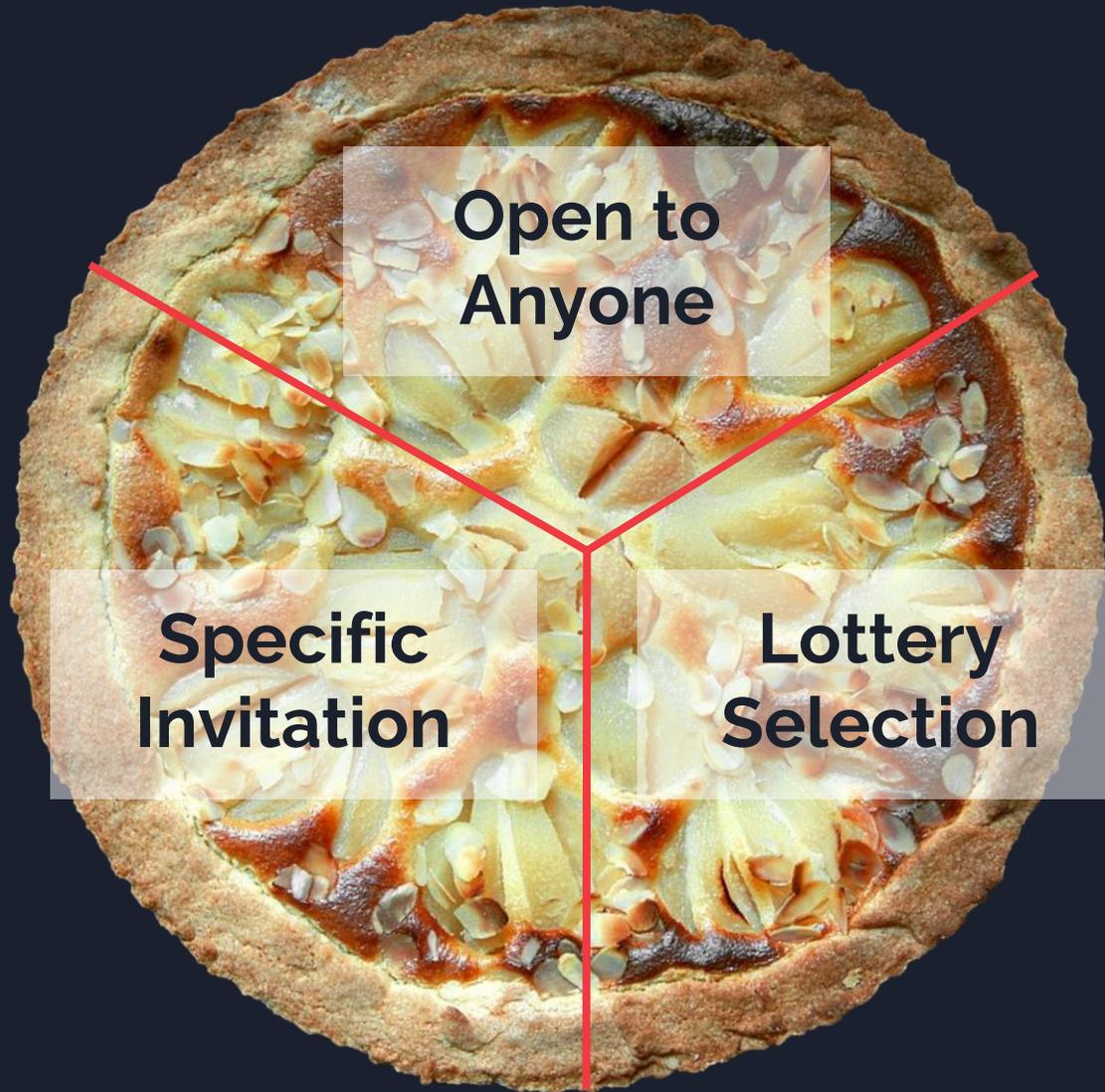


**Open to
Anyone**

**Specific
Invitation**



The Democracy Pie . . .



The Democracy Pie . . .

Better metaphor: *more* Democracy Pies!



**Open to
Anyone**

e.g., surveys, hearings, voting

+ Anyone! (in theory...)

- Same individuals, "thin" participation, debate-oriented



**Specific
Invitation**

e.g., stakeholder negotiations,
outreach to particular community

+ Can be targeted & specialized to issue or impact

- Often same individuals, often top-down orientation



**Lottery
Selection**

e.g., Civic Assemblies

+ Guarantees new & diverse folks, in-depth deliberation, Delegate-led

- Needs time & design

Who's in the Room

Steps of a Three-Stage Democratic Lottery

1. **Set demographic categories & determine targets**
2. **Send invitation letters** to 10,000-20,000 randomly selected residential addresses (and 100+ distributed to folks without addresses)
 - a. Receive replies – typically ~3% response rate
3. Run open source **representative random sampling** algorithm to create 1,000 potential Assemblies, all of which satisfy demographic targets
4. **Public lottery selection event** to select one of these 1,000 Assemblies
 - a. Reselect replacements for folks who can't make it
 - b. Select a group of alternates



Who's in the Room

Reducing Barriers to Participation

All Costs Covered: Panelists receive substantial stipends, plus travel costs, child/elder care, laptops, hotspots, etc.

Direct Panelist Support: one-on-one process onboarding, concierge, tech setup, other accommodations, and ongoing support

Comprehensive Language Access: translation, simultaneous interpretation, plus assistive aids & technologies

Preparation Parity: delay the flood of info (context, technical details, lived experience, etc.) until Panel is seated





What Happens in the Room

Deliberation

What Happens in the Room

The Deliberative Process

- 1. Policy topic & framing question** chosen by convener or, better yet, through a democratic process
- 2. Orientation to the art of group decision making** – collaboration, critical thinking & group awareness
- 3. Extensive learning phase** – info & opinion landscape
 - a. Background presenters (independently selected)
 - b. Briefing materials, lived experience & community input
- 4. Deliberative work** – through iterative small and large groups guided by specially trained moderators
- 5. Policy recommendations** in Delegates' own words, delivered directly to decision makers – with supermajority agreement.



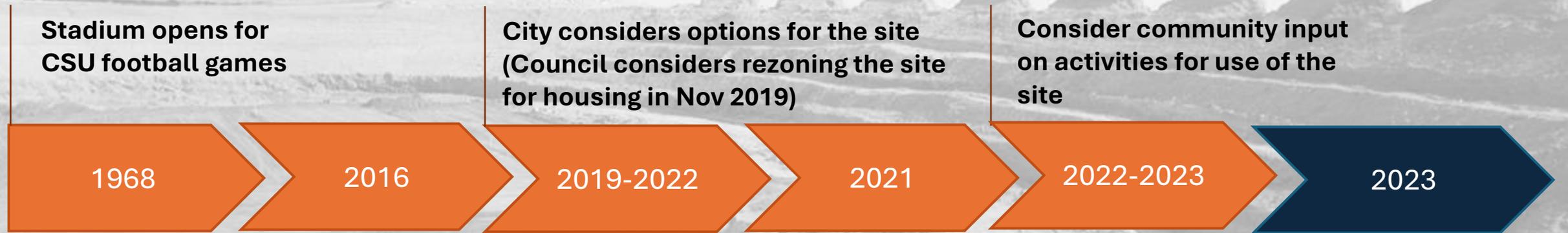
What Happens in the Room

Unique Process Elements & Results

- **Time intensive** – often 40-100+ deliberative hours
- **Directed & governed by Delegates**, as much as possible, rather than by contractors / City staff
- Detailed process designs based on **decades of research** on deliberative policymaking
- Designed to **weigh complex tradeoffs** in service to the broader public good
- **Action-ready recommendations** that are very often adopted by public authorities
- Result in **novel, community-driven, and durable** policy solutions



Background



Historic Site Context



1950



2017

Development Proposal - Feedback

- Many drawings indicated a desire for “Public Open Lands” or POL across the entire site.
- Many other drawings indicated a preference for some development on the site with a protective naturalistic or open space buffer along the western edge of the site.
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August 2019 Open House

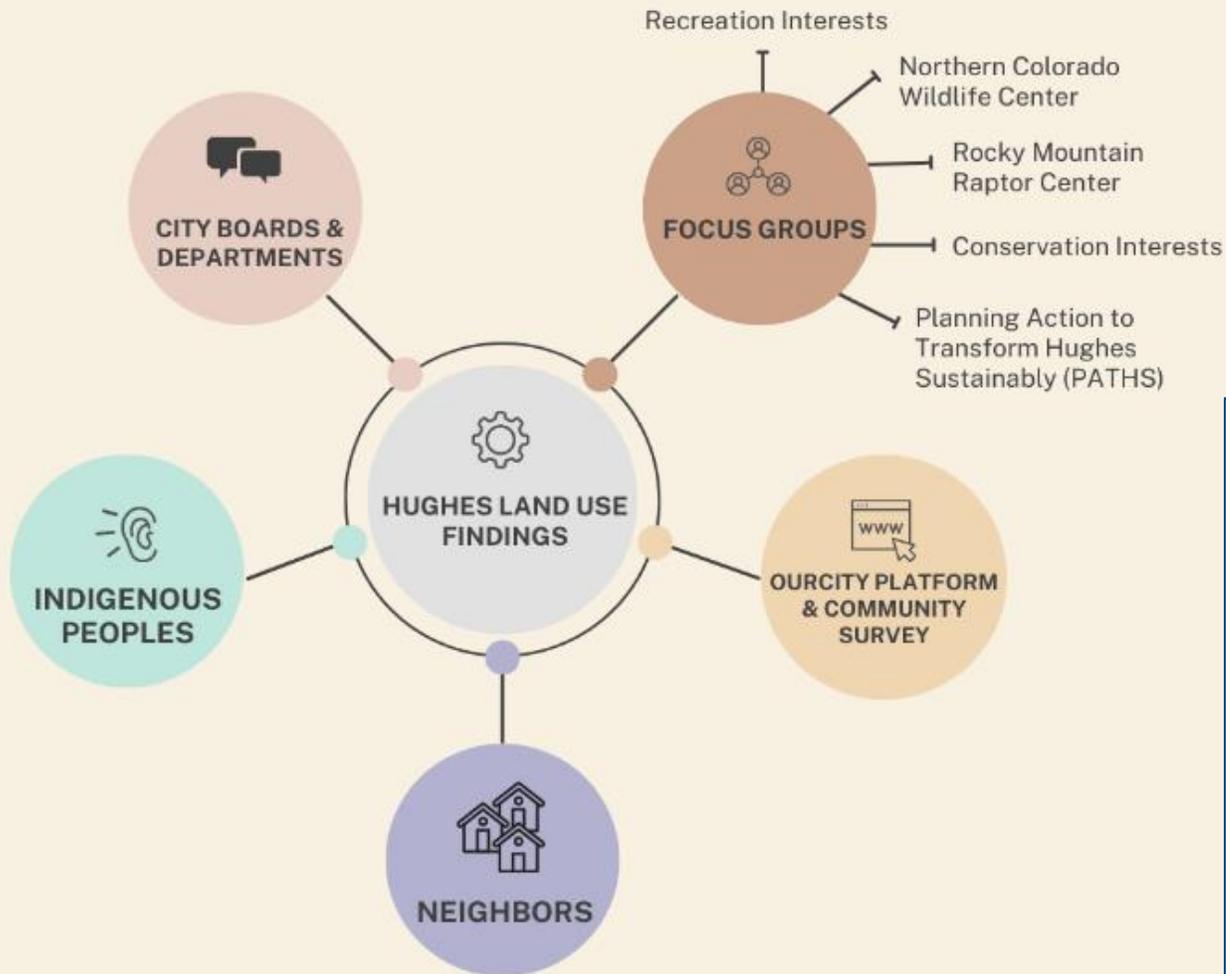
Citizen Initiated Ballot – April 2021

Shall the City enact an ordinance requiring the City Council of the City of Fort Collins to immediately rezone upon passage of the ordinance a 164.56-acre parcel of real property formerly home to the Hughes Stadium from the Transition District to the **Public Open Lands District**, and requiring the City to acquire the property at fair market value to use said property for **parks, recreation, and open lands, natural areas**, and wildlife rescue and restoration, and further prohibiting the City from de-annexing, ceasing acquisition efforts or subsequently rezoning the property without voter approval of a separate initiative referred to the voters by City Council, and granting legal standing to any registered elector in the City to seek injunctive and/or declaratory relief in the courts related to City noncompliance with said ordinance?

28,492 Yes/For 68.61%

13,034 No/Against 31.39%

Engagement Process - 2023



- Based on the 2021 ballot language, how would you prioritize the following uses?
- How would you like to see the space used?



City of
Fort Collins



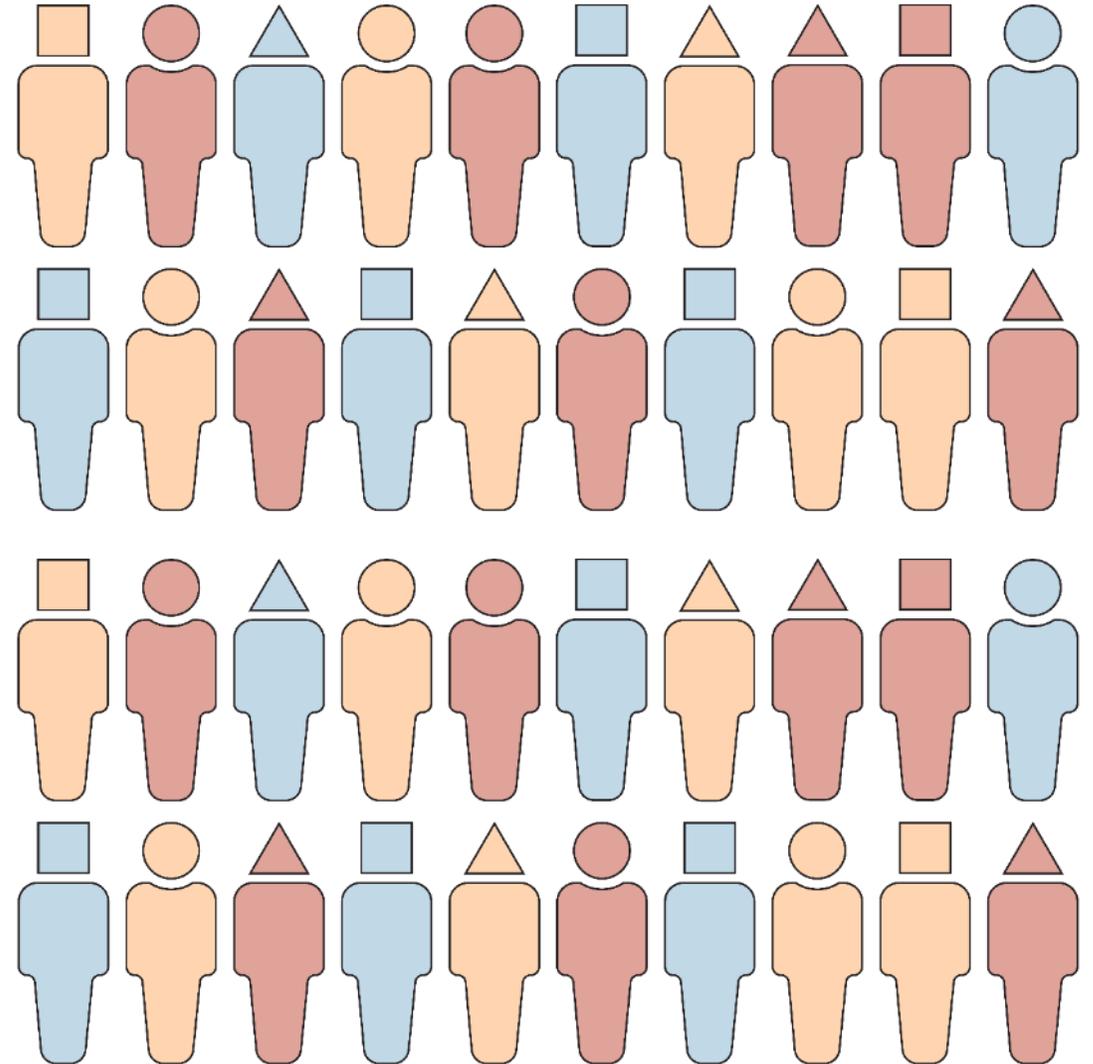
Invitations

- **Invitation postcards** to 15K randomly selected residential addresses.
- Promotions via special interest groups, partners and the Native American Community/Tribal nations
- Applications received online



Demographic Representation

- Council district
- Income
- Age
- Educational Attainment
- Housing Status



Microcosm of Fort Collins community: Assembly Demographics



- 15,000 randomly selected households received invitations.
- Assembly mirrors city's demographics based on 2023 census.
- Some protected classes excluded from selection criteria (legal)

Council District	% of FC pop.	% of all responses	% of CA (# of ppl)
1	16.7	19.4	15 (3)
2	16.7	13.3	15 (3)
3	16.7	10.3	5 (1)
4	16.7	20.9	15 (3)
5	16.7	18.6	25 (5)
6	16.7	17.5	25 (5)

Microcosm of Fort Collins community: Assembly Demographics



Age Range	% of FC pop.	% of all responses	% of Civic Assembly (# of ppl)
16-24	28.2	6.1	25 (5)
25-34	20.8	19.8	20 (4)
35-44	14.8	21.7	20 (4)
45-54	11	18.6	15 (3)
55-64	11	14.8	5 (1)
65-74	8.6	11.8	5 (1)
74+	5.7	7.2	10 (2)

Housing Status	% of FC pop.	% of all responses	% of CA (# of ppl)
Own	57.7	65.4	55 (11)
Rent	42.7	33.8	40 (8)
Unhoused	0.2	0.8	1 (5)

Microcosm of Fort Collins community: Assembly Demographics



Educational Attainment	% of FC pop	% of all responses	% of CA (# of ppl)
Some schooling; no diploma	5.2	2.3	10 (2)
High school diploma or equivalent	15.7	2.7	10 (2)
Some college or Associate's degree	31.9	14.1	25 (5)
Bachelor's degree or higher	47.2	81.0	55 (11)

Household Income (per yr)	% of FC pop	% of all responses	% of CA (# of ppl)
<\$25k	9.5	7.2	15 (3)
\$25k-\$49,999	12.8	12.5	10 (2)
\$50k-\$99,999	25.8	26.2	25 (5)
\$100k-\$199,999	32.9	39.9	35 (7)
>\$200k	19.0	14.1	15 (3)

Community Guides

Organized and conducted conversations in their community. Data from these conversations was compiled into a report and provided to the Assembly

- Coordinated through CSU's CPD
- 16+ Community Guides
- Selected through an application process
- Guides could opt-in for compensation and meeting support
- Applications open Dec. 16 – Jan. 20
- Training sessions February 5 & 12

Information Committee

Tasked with reviewing and compiling information from all sources to be provided to the Assembly.

- Helps to ensure neutral, unbiased and organized information
- Committee comprised of:
 - (4) Community Guides
 - (4) Community Members
 - (4) B&C Representatives

Community Guides

Provided engagement opportunities to residents in small groups

Provided facilitation training for community members

Assisted in issue framing prior to the Assembly



Question to Assembly

“Informed by the diverse needs of our community, what use of the Hughes site will contribute most effectively to Fort Collins’ long-term vitality and meet the requirements outlined in the 2021 ballot measure?”

Process



Super Majority Outcomes Included:

- Property should be utilized for multiple uses
- Indigenous consultation, support, and opportunities should be included
- Natural habitats should be restored throughout use development as possible
- Outdoor education and interpretation should be included
- Community gathering space(s)
- Minimize light pollution
- Include trail connections to Maxwell and Pineridge



Assembly Observations

Diversity of opinions, experience

Ability to disagree and deliberate respectfully

Genuine curiosity and learning from panels, presentations, and one another

Appreciation for recommending and not deciding

Understood weight of considering Fort Collins residents as a whole, not individual desires



Key Reflections

Democratic process

Everyone came with good intentions and faith in the process

Hard to hear some of the community chatter making assumptions about assembly members & process

Honored and humbled to be part of process

Learned so much



Lessons learned

Assemblies are time and labor intensive

Impact of advocacy groups/external community discussion

Clear communication strategies are key

Partnerships are key

Sort out legal issues early



Quotes from Civic Assembly Delegates

“It was the most democratic thing personally I've ever experienced... Political affiliation didn't come up one time, not from anybody.”

“I am more excited about this than I have been about this land in the last, gosh, five years, if not six.”

“Everyone came in with good faith and intentions—for the site and for the community as a whole over both weekends that we met.”

“One of the things I really like is that it's directive but not prescriptive... It represents Fort Collins in such a great way. It has all the elements of Fort Collins... nature, natural areas, recreation, inclusion, and Indigenous populations.”

Future Work

The Center for Public Deliberation is currently beginning research on the Civic Assembly process

Through the summer and fall, they'll complete interviews with Assembly delegates and Community Guides to determine the impacts of this process



THANK YOU!



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- We appreciate your feedback!

