



**Focus on Longmont: Share your vision, Create our legacy**

**Phase 1 Interim Report**





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## Introduction

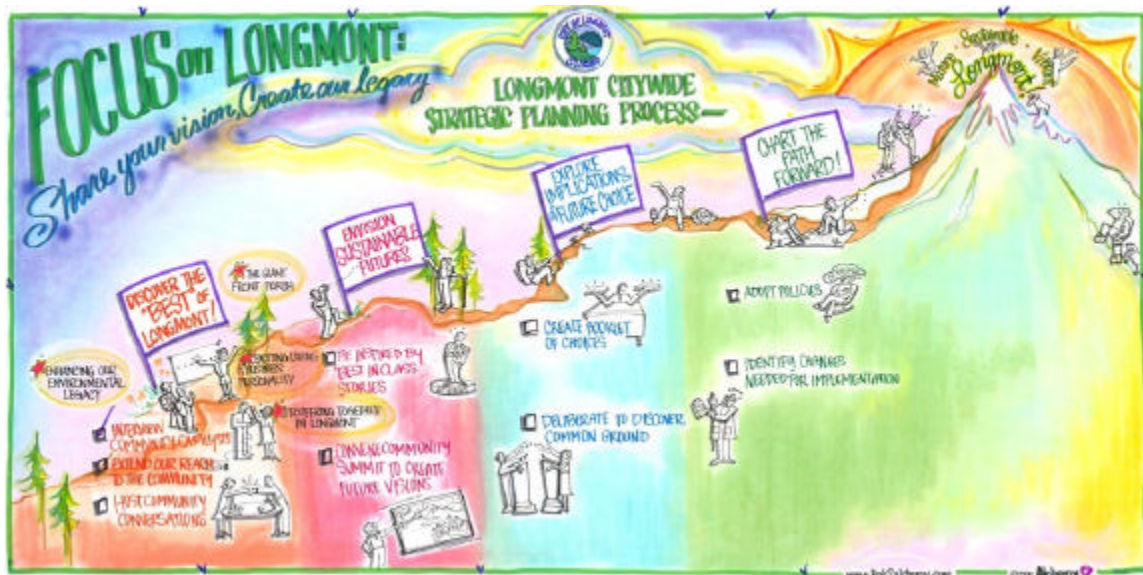
The *Focus on Longmont* initiative is a 10-month project launched by the Longmont City Council in January 2005. The purpose is to develop community supported strategic policies that, if implemented, will ensure a freestanding, sustainable Longmont after build out of its planning boundaries.

Because of the importance of this initiative to Longmont's future, the City chose an approach that would engage a broad cross section of the community in the development and eventual implementation of this citywide strategic plan. The process combines two proven methods for community-wide planning, Appreciative Inquiry (Phase 1) and Deliberative Dialogue (Phase 2.) This approach was chosen to capitalize on the following strengths in the two methods:

- The ability to personally engage people with diverse experiences in working together on defining the city's strengths and ideas for the future.
- Framing issues and providing pertinent information in a way that makes sense to the community.
- Fostering in-depth and forward-looking deliberations among community members on future trade-offs.
- Exploring common ground among choices that capture the community members' values.

Phase 1 of the project (just completed) has been targeted towards Mobilizing the Voices and Visions of Longmont through a variety of one-to-one interviews, community conversations, best in class interviews and a community Summit. People all across the community participated in thoughtful conversations about the city's future. These conversations revealed stories and insights on Longmont at its best, and connected individuals to the larger community and its future.

Phase 1 produced a comprehensive collective understanding of Longmont's positive core strengths. These strengths describe Longmont at its best and they are essential to the City's social and strategic vitality. As part of Phase 1, the community's stories and quotes about Longmont at its best were captured in a slide show presented at the community Summit. This slide show is included on CD in Appendix A to this report. Phase 1 also produced a mapping of the community's compelling ideas for the future.



Phase 2 (now launching) will involve Community Choice Making on Policy Directions. Phase 2 draws upon the data from Phase 1 to create choices or Directions for Action for the future. The community will deliberate among these choices. In the deliberative forums, participants will engage in what the National Issues Forums calls “Choicework” where people work through future directions for the community. The deliberative forums will reveal a shared view about the general direction for community action in the best interest of the community. Findings from deliberative forums will be used to craft policy directions that will guide the community toward achieving its future visions as a sustainable, freestanding community.

This report summarizes Phase 1 activities and insights. It also outlines what we’ve learned about Longmont’s “positive core” and possible future. It serves as the foundation for the development of strategic policies during Phase 2.

The data from Phase 1 includes hundreds of stories and ideas about Longmont today and tomorrow. The data is drawn from the activities conducted in Phase 1, including interviews, community conversations, best in class research and the community Summit. The data is summarized in the following attachments to this report:

- Attachment 1: Data from Interviews and Community Conversations
- Attachment 2: Data from the Community Summit

Throughout the initiative, we will continually return to this summary as we make choices about how to implement our hopes and dreams for the future.



## The Process, To Date

### January through March 2005

We had five important goals during the first three months of our process:

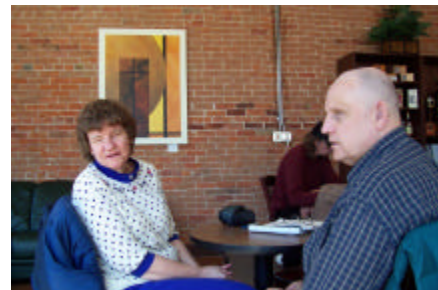
- Draw many members of the Longmont community into the process, representing as many different perspectives as possible.
- Forge new relationships across different segments of the community.
- Build connections and a sense of appreciation between city employees and citizens.
- Learn the breadth of the community's understanding of Longmont's strengths.
- Build ownership for and enthusiasm about the planning process, in order to increase involvement in both the April Summit (below) and Phase 2 of the project (in process).



In keeping with these goals, we cast an ever widening net over the Longmont community, inviting more and more people to participate, establish relationships, and share ideas and insights related to our future as a freestanding, mature community.

We started with a 35-person Coordinating Team, which formed and planned the details of how to involve the community in this crucial planning process. The Coordinating Team was facilitated by the Consulting Team and supported by the City's Leadership Team. Members of this team conducted over 80 one-on-one interviews with a wide array of community leaders. (A copy of the interview guide appears in Attachment 1)

The people who first participated in these interviews became the "next generation" of supporters for our process. They helped build involvement in our Community Conversations, which involved over 350 people from all walks of life in Longmont. Together, participants in the conversations represented over 146 different organizations and citizen groups. Many of the participants rarely, if ever, take part in city-sponsored planning activities.



Most participants had key opportunities to meet and establish relationships with people who were outside of their immediate relational circles. A summary of key



stories and insights from the one-to-one interviews and Community Conversations appears in Attachment 1.

Throughout the period of interviews and conversations, we collected stories and tracked patterns. This allowed the Coordinating Team (with guidance from the Consulting Team) to determine the key elements of Longmont's *positive core* – those things that are *uniquely good* about our community that must be *preserved and built upon* as we move into the future as a freestanding, mature community.

Finally, we interviewed several “Best in Class” cities around the country, which we believed could provide us with new insights and ideas about how to build on the best of what we’ve been as we move towards a sustainable future after build out.

### April 2005

We wrapped up our community conversations, and analyzed the stories that had surfaced through interviews and Community Conversations. The “positive core” that the Coordinating Team thus identified became the launch-point for our one-day community Summit, which took place in mid-April.



The goals of the Summit were to build on the work that we completed in January through March, continuing to foster relationships and connections within and across the city. In addition, the Summit was designed to inspire people's creativity, bringing forth compelling shared visions for the future of Longmont as a mature, sustainable community after build out.

We achieved these goals by gathering over 180 community members from throughout Longmont to validate our positive core (as identified by the Coordinating Team). Summit attendees then discussed the *root causes of our success* – those people, systems, structures, places, funding, etc. that have contributed to our positive core. These are the factors that have enabled Longmont to be the great place that it is. They are the conditions that we must replicate in the future, if we are to consistently reproduce our successes.

Finally, Summit participants then envisioned the future of Longmont (both individually and in small groups), identifying common priorities for how the city might evolve in the future.



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## What We Learned about Longmont's Positive Core

Based on the stories that were told in interviews and community conversations, the Leadership and Coordinating teams identified *six key elements* of Longmont's positive core. Together, these elements describe what is uniquely good about Longmont, and what it is like at its best.

Following is a summary of these key elements, together with supporting stories that surfaced either in interviews, community conversations, or table discussions on the morning of the Summit.

- Small town feel – Longmont is a community with a “real” downtown and a small town feel. The community values small businesses and the community's history.

*When Katrina first moved here, she didn't know anything about Longmont. Many of her friends had been really negative about her move, saying she wouldn't be safe; so when she was asked where she lived, she'd say Boulder rather than Longmont.*

*Shortly after her move there was a big parade near her home. She couldn't park her car near her apartment, because traffic, and parking, had both been rerouted. She was feeling really grumpy about it, when suddenly she heard all this noise, and saw bands and people in the distance.*

*She went downstairs and sat on her porch, waving to people who waved back at her as they went by. Everyone was so friendly. She felt warm and welcomed, and suddenly blessed to be in Longmont.*

- Quality natural environment – Natural spaces are important and the city has an eco-friendly attitude.

*The City sponsored an Arbor Day celebration that was really special. They had equipment there, trees, trucks, and activities for children such as tree climbing and rides on equipment. City workers helped give kids experiences that were exciting but safe. City reps were friendly, open and knowledgeable.*



*The celebration was free and open to the public. Lots of people showed up and had a great time – but perhaps more important, people got a new perspective on what it means to be a community “caretaker.” They learned how they could care for their own yards in ways that would make the community better.*

- Celebrating together – Longmont provides a friendly environment for folks from all walks of life.

*Dina truly felt a part of the community when her son’s Cub Scout pack had the opportunity to participate in Longmont’s Parade of Lights this past December (2004).*

*They created their own float and felt so special riding down the middle of Main Street waving to all the other “Longmonters.” It was a great occasion that brought the whole community together.*



*I will always carry that image of his huge smile with the giant Lego (the float’s theme) plopped on his head. I have to admit I felt a little “royal” walking alongside the float and waving to “the people.”*

- Opportunity for all – The community values education and there are different job opportunities. People care about seeing others succeed.

*My wife got a letter from the grade school principal, asking for her input. The school was interested in understanding how to make things more inviting for the Latino population. As a result of the input they received, the staff decided to change the vacation schedule to accommodate the Latino students. They also added bilingual teachers and a food share program.*





- An engaged community – Longmont supports a culture of “giving back” and there is room for everyone to make a difference. The community is committed to breaking new ground in reaching across cultural divides and values global relations.

*A while back, the Children’s Chorale wanted to send 30 kids to perform at Carnegie Hall. This was a great opportunity – one that really broadened the kids’ experience – but it cost of lot of money. Various Longmont businesses contributed items that were subsequently sold for fundraising purposes. The money was raised, and the chorale had a fabulous trip to New York!*

- Facilitative city leadership – City government has adopted an entrepreneurial style with employees who are personal and responsive. The City also helps support and facilitates community action.

*The city had a grant program that enabled them to rent dumpsters at a good price. Our neighborhood rented a dumpster and had a neighborhood clean-up day.*

## **Best in Class Interviews and Reflections**

Having confirmed our positive core through storytelling and conversation, we turned our attention to new horizons. A team of Best in Class interviewers shared what they had learned from interviews with 9 cities around the country including: Eugene, OR; Madison, WI; Missoula, MT; Scottsdale, Tempe and Yuma, AZ; Ft. Collins, CO; and Burlington, VT. Here are some of the highlights of those presentations:

- Revitalization of a downtown area is one of the most effective ways to stimulate the local economy, while enhancing people’s sense of community. Downtown areas in several other cities have been stimulated by the emergence of vital small businesses, residences (e.g., lofts), and entertainment. Lunchtime entertainment and street vendors bring people into downtown from other parts of the city.
- Pedestrian options (i.e., wide sidewalks, benches, free transit on a regular schedule) also stimulate downtown activity.
- Cross-cultural celebrations in other cities have included a “world community fair,” summer picnics, and Friday Afternoon Celebrations for international residents.



- Neighborhood grants, a neighborhood leadership school, and neighborhood roundups all build people's local sense of connection and enhance grassroots capacities.
- Local universities have the potential to be strong strategic partners in terms of building up the community.
- Mentoring relationships between businesses and schools, or between schools and neighborhood groups – at the elementary and post-secondary levels, as well as high schools – foster performance and increase kids' chances of graduating high school and continuing their education.
- Regional partnerships for the purchase of large blocks of open space increase cities' capacities to preserve easements, backdrops, and trail systems.

Following the four Best in Class presentations, table groups discussed and considered the implications of what they'd heard for the future of Longmont. Many of these images appeared in people's individual and collective reflections about future possibilities.

## Envisioning Longmont's Future

The process of envisioning Longmont's future, begun in the interviews and community conversations, was amplified during the Summit. The plenary room at the Summit contained quotes and dreams from interviews and community conversations, depicted as a "yellow brick road" leading into the meeting room. Here is a sample of these images:

- *"Strong neighborhoods build strong communities."*
- *"Create businesses that produce goods by re-using someone else's castaways."*
- *"Become a leader in state for solar energy and green building."*
- *"Offer multi-cultural small groups a chance to learn about one another."*
- *"Partner with private enterprise to grow culture/recreation facilities."*



Following the Summit's "root cause of success" analysis, individuals and small groups further considered and shared images for Longmont's future in response to the following question:

Imagine Longmont *fifteen years from today* – in the year 2020. It is a vibrant, freestanding community whose growth has slowed – but whose prosperity has continued . . . even blossomed. The community is everything you'd hoped and wished for, *and* there is enough money in the City to pay for what we have. What do you see????

- What is the *same* from the Longmont of 2005?
- What is *different*? Be specific. List at least *three* ways in which the City has changed.
- How have the changes you've just described helped everyone to prosper together in Longmont?
- How are these positive changes funded? Who pays for what? How?

Certain images of the future were repeated over and over again:

- A vibrant downtown with great curb-appeal - *"Host to strong small businesses, cultural activities, and community. Create a 'Hop, Skip and Jump' system that links downtown to the riverwalk and other parts of the city."*
- Vital retail centers across the City – *"Place shopping areas so that they reinforce and strengthen neighborhood relationships."*
- Healthy Environment – *"It's a fine vintage, this Longmont water!"*
- Connected Trails, Parks and Open Space – *"Pedestrian trails link all areas of the City"*
- Diverse entertainment, especially for young people – *"A culturally-based 'Taste of Longmont' celebration; music, culture, recreation and arts that draw people together."*
- Prosperity – *"jobs, jobs, jobs . . ."*
- Volunteerism and Connecting People as Citizens – *A volunteer bank . . . everyone has something to contribute*
- Quality Education – *city-supported skills training, pre-K to 12, partnership with colleges*
- Diversity as the Heart of Longmont – *"My little voice meant a lot."*





- Housing Opportunities for Everyone – “Creative approaches to affordable housing.”

These images, which are depicted on the collective “map” of the future, represent the spirit of the whole population of Summit participants.



## Considering Next Steps

Our transition into Phase 2 of the project began at the Summit with a conversation about Next Steps. We asked people to organize into interest groups, and to identify future actions that could be taken within the City and community of Longmont in order to realize our dreams for the future. We asked them, specifically, to articulate:



- What shall the city/community *be* like that's the same or different from today?
- What shall the City government *do* that's the same or different from today?

(See Attachment 2 for the data collected at the community Summit, including stories, images, ideas and responses to these questions.)

Two days after the Summit, the Coordinating Team met to further refine this feedback. The data from Phase 1 is providing the foundation for framing different directions for action for the City. The Consulting Team will prepare a Priority-Setting Deliberation Guide that describes these directions and relevant



implications for the city's future. In July, community members will participate in Deliberative Forums with the Guide as a basis for their deliberations.

## What We've Learned

We've learned a lot through these last four months of intense activity. Some of what we've learned has helped us to understand what's best about the city and community of Longmont – and what we need to build upon – as we move into the future as a mature freestanding community.

We've also learned how to engage the citizens of Longmont in decisions that affect their future. Specifically, from the Summit's closing interview we've learned that:

- Personal contact yields a higher return than random invitations.
- People learn more when they engage with people from outside of their immediate circles. Phase 1 especially worked because a variety of people were involved – from City government, businesses, and neighborhoods, with a diversity of age, ethnicity, and experience.
- We need to keep communication flowing, and keep the process moving.
- Adapt the approach to outreach and the process and materials for special populations – personally invite people to participate, provide transportation for elders, and organize Spanish-speaking tables and community conversations.
- LARGE groups of people create a certain magic.
- Encourage people to move from the personal to the collective.
- Give voice to different perspectives helping people to really *listen* to one another.
- Remain positive, and spread the stories that affirm what's RIGHT in Longmont. (*"This was an uplifting and hope-filled planning process."*)
- Stay focused on the big picture – the future of our community.

As best as we are able, we intend to integrate these insights into Phase 2 of the project. In addition, however, we hope to have proven an alternative model for community-based planning activities that will help support Longmont's future as a vibrant, freestanding, sustainable community after build out.