



2023 Listening Tour with Mayor Yemi & City Council District 4 Feedback Summary Report

Overview: This report provides a summary of all of the feedback captured at the District 4 Listening Session with Councilmembers Yolanda Avila (District 4) and David Leinweber (At-Large) at the Southeast & Armed Forces YMCA on Sept. 8, 2023. Feedback received from this session does not necessarily reflect feedback solely from residents who live in District 4.

Summary:

Public Safety & Homelessness:

In District 4, responses to public safety improvements were mostly centered around better training for police officers and CSPD's engagement with the community as opposed to adding more officers; in fact, many stated that they felt the City did not need more police at all. The community had a number of suggestions on how to improve relations with the police, including offering a ride-along program for high school students, an independent commission for accountability, and more intentional recruiting for a diverse police force.

Homelessness was also addressed frequently, with most expressing support for enforcing existing laws while boosting funding for mental health support services and ways to solve 'root' issues of homelessness rather than just moving individuals from one location to another or arresting them.

Infrastructure & Utilities:

Many people expressed support for better public transportation, particularly regional transit and the Front Range Rail project. Several said that the City needs to be more pro-active in furthering that regional rail project. Local public transportation was also identified as needing improvement, with several people commenting that the City's bus system in particular needs funding for cleaner, safer buses and enhanced routes.

Many commented that Southeast Colorado Springs often feels left out of road, sidewalk, and greenery improvement projects. In addition to fixing potholes and building out ADA accessible sidewalks, especially in areas that lack sidewalks entirely, many stated that the City needs more trees and greenery incorporated into infrastructure to prevent the area from being 'covered in concrete.'

Several people also asked for more public restroom facilities, consolidated trash services, and better recycling options.

Economy:

A theme in much of the feedback from District 4 was that the area often feels left out of the economic growth and job opportunities seen in other areas of the city. The need for job opportunities beyond tech and the military / defense sector was identified, and many commented that the Colorado Springs Airport could do more to 'integrate' itself into the community and create opportunities for local jobs.

Housing / Development:

Many people stated that they see far too many car washes and self-storage facilities being developed, but that the southeast area of the city is a food desert and needs more grocery options. As in the other sessions, housing affordability was a critical issue for most attendees, and requests for more starter homes as well as middle-income housing were raised, plus ownership opportunities (condos) downtown instead of just rental units.

Almost everyone voiced support for more redevelopment and infill development within existing City boundaries as opposed to expanding into new greenfield development further out. Regarding redevelopment, many felt that property owners should be taxed or fined for letting properties sit vacant and dilapidated. Several also suggested that landlords are taking advantage of renters, particularly young renters, with fees and fines that may not be legal.

City Governance / Administration:

Citizens proposed that the City could do more to improve communication and transparency by providing multi-lingual options for non-English speakers. It was also suggested that the City could do more to educate the public on how government works, opportunities to get involved, and opportunities to better connect and make use of available resources.

It was also proposed that City Council needs to be salaried to make the positions accessible to more people, and that the City could do more to increase diversity in its own workforce.

And, as in other listening sessions, citizens asked for more funding for the Parks Department and public recreation facilities.

Schools / Education:

As in other districts, many people felt that our schools could do more trade and workforce education, as well as host more financial literacy classes for students. Regarding school safety, people suggested that LGBT and minority students need more protections in schools and that D2 needs more school resource officers to protect students. A few mentioned that schools should do more to educate students about artificial intelligence (AI) and prepare students for both AI-related and AI-proof jobs.

Other Topics:

See full notes for other topics and items raised by attendees.

Full Notes:

Organized by topic; asterisk (*) indicates repeated sentiment.

Topic: Public Safety & Homelessness

- Police don't respond to car accidents or any other complaints.*
- Need to 'deal with homelessness, not just push them from one place to another'.
- Fix existing problems with CSPD before bringing in new officers.
- Need more police to reduce response times.
- Gun violence is a problem in District 4.**
- Need program for CSPD to connect with D4 community in different languages.
- Need more diversity in CSPD.
- CSPD policing 'not doing well' in SE; '16 year disparity in life expectancy in D4'.**
- Police abuse – especially toward 'teens of color in D4'.*
- Police officers should have mandatory mental health / fitness evaluations.
- Don't need more police, need better training and retention.
- Don't need more police; 'police just not focused on the right things'.****
- Need community 'peace officers without a gun like in Europe'.
- Need short-term mental health housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- No new police training academy.**
- Need a commission for police accountability and transparency.
- Need more to be done for wildfire mitigation / climate change / extreme weather as a safety issue.
- Need more intentional recruiting for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) police officers in D4.
- Police should have a ride-along program for high schools and encourage its use.
- Need to 'humanize police' more.

Topic: Infrastructure & Utilities

- Too many utility service outages in Southeast Colorado Springs; not reliable infrastructure.
- Need potholes in roadways to be fixed; not often being fixed 'correctly the first time'.
- D4 needs more green space, bike paths, and public transportation.
- Invest in better public transportation.*
- Construction too often blocks access to businesses and sidewalks.
- Need more greenery to reduce urban heat island effect; too much concrete.
- 'Should not have to pay a fee to pay Colorado Springs Utilities bills'.
- 'Took 2 hours to do a 5 mile bus trip – fix the buses'.
- Lots of streets with no sidewalks at all.**
- Need late night bus service.
- Commuter traffic is getting worse in Colorado Springs.
- Healthcare transportation is a problem.
- Not enough east-west transit corridors.
- Need more pro-active support and work on Front Range Rail project.*****

- Need more regional public transportation.
- Make solar street lights a priority.
- Good to see Drake decommissioning; redevelop it for something better.
- Need consolidated trash services, better recycling services.**
- Need public restrooms in Colorado Springs.**
- City's roadway medians are 'ugly, full of weeds, not maintained'.*

Topic: Economy

- Southeast's economy does not feel diverse or sustainable.
- 80916 and 80910 being overlooked for economic growth.
- Need a D4 Business District with 1 cent tax for funding.
- Not creating enough jobs for students coming out of D4.
- Use the Colorado Springs Airport to create more jobs in D4.
- Cost of living too high.**
- 'Growth is up, crime is down, but only in wealthy neighborhoods'.
- Need to boost wages in Colorado Springs.
- Require new / big companies to invest in building community and 'give back'.
- Olympic City good for tourism.
- Lack of opportunities outside of tech / military.

Topic: Housing / Development

- Too many car washes and storage facilities.**
- Not enough grocery stores / food desert.****
- Lacking affordable housing.***
- Need ownership condos in downtown.
- Rapid Response for permits is a good thing.
- Need more 'middle income' housing – not 3,500+ square foot housing.
- Landlords exploiting renters and students with extra fees and policies, not following the law.***
- Need city investment in community centers.
- Too much concrete, not enough greenery in D4.**
- 'No one wants to live next to the airport'.
- 'Airport needs to be more integrated into the community'.*
- Citadel Mall needs to be redeveloped into affordable housing.
- 'City should duplicate Solid Rock Development Corporation'.
- Tax or put fees on building owners who let their buildings sit vacant and dilapidated, use money to redevelop.
- 'Briargate has everything – why not here?'
- Need hospital in D4.
- Need more housing for senior citizens.
- Need more urban renewal programs in Southeast Colorado Springs.
- New apartments need more access to public transit or more parking.
- Need more redevelopment and infill development, not more expansion of city boundaries.**
- Improvements in South Nevada area are good.

- Need more collaboration with non-profit developers, organizations.

Topic: City Governance / Government Administration

- Need to see more diversity / representation in City's workforce.*
- Not many people know how to find / connect with City services or to make reports (GoCOS!).
- Need City communications to be multilingual.
- Need accountability for requests / reports made through GoCOS!.
- Panorama Park is excellent, need more.
- Need more education for the public on how the city government works.
- 'Worried about relationships with City / Colorado Springs Utilities and accountability, transparency'.
- City parks / forestry understaffed and underfunded.
- City could provide more jobs for high school students in parks department.
- Use TABOR refunds for infrastructure, not for police academy.
- City Council needs a proper salary.
- Need more diverse voices in decision making on attracting new companies / employers.

Topic: Schools / Education:

- Need education system more aligned to available jobs in Colorado Springs.
- Incentivize large companies to have educational programs for kids in Colorado Springs.
- D2 schools 'doing the best they can with the resources they have'.
- Boost trade education in schools.***
- D2 schools need more school resource officers.
- Need more protections for diversity in schools, LGBT, minority students.*
- Need students to be educated on artificial intelligence (AI) and/or jobs that AI won't replace.

Topic: Other

- 'Bring CONO to southeast Colorado Springs'.
- 'Hispanic community not getting a voice'.
- 'Need more discounts for seniors, not just military'.
- City needs relationship with YMCA – 'why have the pools closed?'
- Move Palmer statue out of the road and into a park.**
- The 17th tee at Valley Hi has a 'lake that stinks'.
- 'City has to get out of bed with the YMCA'.
- Closure of Garden Ranch YMCA 'did youth a huge disservice'.
- Use TABOR refunds for infrastructure, not police academy.
- Make Pikes Peak more affordable for families.
- 'Southeast Digital Divide' is a problem.
- 'Not giving up TABOR refund'.