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# Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET) #4 Report

*Comité de Involucramiento Latino (LET) grupo #4 de Commerce City*



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# Introductions

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. Since 2015, the city has proactively taken steps to become a more equitable city, especially for Latino community members who often felt unseen or unheard. An inclusive community, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, is made up of a community that does everything that it can to respect all its citizens, gives them full access to resources, and promotes equal treatment and opportunity; works to eliminate all forms of discrimination; engages all its citizens in the process of making decisions that affect their lives; values diversity; and responds quickly to racist and other discriminating incidents.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Commerce City was home to over 64,000 individuals as of July 2022. 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 48.6% of the Commerce City population in 2022, and this number continues to increase. The majority of families in southern part of Commerce City are of mixed-documentation status, meaning that one or more member of the household is waiting on legal documentation status. 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. The purpose of LET, made in partnership with Commerce City, is to help encourage Latino community members to participate and take advantage of the city's events and resources.

The members of LET facilitated by Cultivando and the Commerce City Liaison assigned to LET hope that this report will support Commerce City in continuing the important endeavor of making Commerce City an inclusive community.

# History of LET

In December 2015, Cultivando was contracted to develop, support, and facilitate the LET program to assist Commerce City in building a stronger and more inclusive community. The first LET followed an eight-month process to meet with, learn, and make recommendations to city leadership. A second LET was created in November 2017 with 15 Latina Commerce City community members, all of whom were monolingual Spanish speakers at the time. LET #3 was created in December 2019 with 15 new members, which eventually graduated in January 2022 due to delays from the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic also forced the LET experience for group #3 to move virtually up until the graduation.

Since the beginning, there have been a number of areas for improvement that remain relevant, including but not limited to the following:

- Continuous improvement of language access;
- Implementation of cultural events including activities that celebrate Latino culture;
- 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; and
- Co-development of park and community safety strategies with community members, Police Department and Parks and Recreation staff.



# LET #4

With funding from the City of Commerce City, Cultivando facilitated the fourth Latino Engagement Taskforce (LET #4), which consisted of 21 Commerce City community members. The goal of LET 4 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 Council and City Manager Jason Rogers, recognize that many Latino community members do not participate, interact, and engage in city processes and programs at rates proportional to the population. The genuine commitment to understand how to better work with and serve the Latino community in Commerce City is what created and drove this project.

The goals of 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. Furthermore, LET facilitates the active engagement of Latino community members through events and resources. 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 #4 are important steps towards achieving this goal for the city. Commerce City's commitment to this work is admirable and the effort is a great example for cities across Colorado and beyond.

# LET #4 (continued)

Members of LET #4 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 an overview of the city's organization, Police Department, Public Works Department, Small Business Resource Center, Clerk's Office, Community Development, and more. The objectives of the task force were to:

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

The monthly meetings allowed members of LET #4 to learn about different departments in the city and ask questions as they desired. Monthly conversations allowed for members to directly express their questions in concerns to the available department during the two hour scheduled meetings.

The first meeting for LET #4 was held via Zoom on Friday, July 22. Subsequent meetings were held on the third Friday of each month from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, LET #4 began their meetings completely virtual but by their sixth meeting in December, switched to a hybrid format where the majority of the participation occurred in-person.

Alondra Gonzalez Carrillo served as the Commerce City Liaison and helped facilitate monthly meetings alongside Cultivando staff. Cultivando and city staff met prior to the start of LET to prepare and coordinate the logistics of the meetings (topics, logistics, areas of improvement, etc). 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. Unfortunately, participation was not very high during the five meetings where attendance was virtual, furthermore proving that in-person participation is vital to the success of the LET program.

Overviews of each meeting are highlighted in the following pages, with general notes and recommendations made by members.

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #1

### **City Manager presentation + Overview of the City of Commerce City**

*Presentation given by previous City Manager, Roger Tinklenberg followed by a separate presentation given by Alondra Gonzalez Carrillo on Friday, July 22.*

#### Notes:

- City Manager at the time, Roger Tinklenberg, gave a presentation with live interpretation about himself and his role within the organization
- Mr. Tinkleberg went over the purpose of LET and how the city tries to encourage engagement from the Latino community in Commerce City
- The objectives of LET were covered
- The presentation ended with Mr. Tinklenberg thanking everyone for their involvement and welcomed questions, but none were asked.
- Afterwards, Alondra gave an overview of the city including facilities and departments within the city.
- Alondra covered details of the Civic Center, Municipal Services Center, Eagle Pointe Recreation Center, Bison Ridge Recreation Center, Buffalo Run Golf Course and Bison Grill Restaurant, and Paradise Island.
- Numbers of resources in the city were shared

#### Comments made by group:

- There was a concern regarding the difficulty of getting a permit by one of the members;
- A suggestion was given of having more education for children regarding the dangers of yielding a weapon such as a gun;
- One member expressed she doesn't have enough greenery, parks and open space for her children to play;
- One member expressed how she wants to start her own food truck business and wanted to be connected with the right people, she was connected with the Small Business Resource Center;
- One member expressed how she applied for a job at Eagle Pointe and had not heard back, she was connected with HR; and
- One member shared how there are fast cars speeding through her area and that she would like speed bumps placed on her street.

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #2

### Police Department

*Rick Myers, Kendall Grove, Marianna Ontiveros, and Miguel Castellanos gave the presentation on Friday, Aug. 19*

#### Notes:

- Covered in the presentation was police beats (districts) – the way the sections of the city are divided; crime statistics; community events; staffing and the need for more police officers; neighborhood watch; 10 things you can do to protect your car; and CodeRed alerts.
- Note that there is usually more police coverage in the south
- Note that burglary rates have gone down
- Mention of community events included “Polar Pop Up on Aug. 20” and the Southern and Northern Area Commander Meetings
- Note that police officers usually use a language line that helps translate in the moment when the officer is not Spanish speaker
- Note that the police department does not inquire about immigration status unless a crime is committed

#### Comments made by group:

- Rufina brought up the education for students to ensure safety and weapon education
- There are currently no educational programs but there’s an opportunity to partner with schools
- Lily mentioned she was in a crash and that the number she called didn’t work
- Maria mentioned wanting to put speed bumps near school zones
- Grove told her he is the right person to contact
- Yenis mentioned that she called the police once and they had her daughter translate because there were no Spanish speakers
- Question made about efforts to stop domestic violence or how to handle it when there is fear
- Told that you can always call 911 and ask to remain anonymous

#### Questions:

- How do you join neighborhood watch?
- How does the Park Ranger assist the Police Department?
- How do things stay anonymous? – Why does the police ask for our names?
- What are the Police doing to engage and respect the Latino Community?

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #3

### Small Business Resource Center

*Nancy Flock gave the presentation on Friday, Sept. 16*

#### Notes:

- Introduced to the ShopWhereILive.com program – an online marketplace where you can support local businesses
- Reminder that buying/shopping locally helps bring money back into the city
- Shared the new Greyhound Park housing opportunities, including a rent-to-own housing program
- The announcement of a new Woodspring Suites hotel
- Reminder to check the redefiningcommerce.com website to learn more about the business development in the city

#### Comments made by group:

- Yenis said there is no shade area for the schools

#### Questions:

- Guadalupe – with more people coming / new houses, hoe does the city support preparing schools, roads, overall services, to support that kind of growth outside of just new businesses?
- Maria – how can we help control the need for permits and the up keep of a business, it feels like it's hard to run a business, are there any resources to help businesses with these kinds of costs, i.e. the cost of businesses licenses/permits?



# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #4

### Streets & Parks

*Leonardo Molina, Rogelio Moncada, and Gilberto Galvan gave the presentation on Friday, Oct. 21.*

#### Notes:

- The Public Works Department phone number is 303-289-8150
- For any questions or concerns, or recommendations every resident is invited to visit [c3gov.com/AskC3](http://c3gov.com/AskC3) (since the presentation, this website has now changed to [c3gov.com/AccessC3](http://c3gov.com/AccessC3)) and submit their comments, the comments will be distributed to the right department
- The Street Sweeping schedule was shared with the group; however, the city needs to translate the sweep schedule so that it is available in Spanish.
- To reach the Parks Department, call either of the recreation centers and share your concerns
- Parks and streets are always looking for seasonal employees, opportunities to apply exists at [c3gov.com/jobs](http://c3gov.com/jobs)

#### Comments made by group:

- The city is in need of something for the winter, an indoor park
- The city is in need of more trees
- Rogelio mentioned that it's often hard to plant new trees or maintain the existing ones because residents often break tree limbs, whether it's for fun or by accident
- Sub comment made that it would be beneficial to give children educational resources to tell kids not to break trees because of what it means to have them in good conditions
- Recommendation to start a campaign through social media platforms to reach students/children
- Mention of how there's no direct transportation from the south to the north part of the city
- Rogelio mentioned that this is an ongoing problem, however this is controlled by RTD, and residents can help by sharing the need with RTD
- For future references, the city should try to get Parks involved in outdoor community projects to educate the public – an example is the Cultivando event where residents planted trees

#### Questions:

- Does Parks work with Park Rangers? – Answer: Park Rangers patrol on their own to provide their resources to residents whereas the parks division works on the maintenance of the parks
- How can we provide more visibility in the parks? – Answer: Rogelio expressed that there are current conversations about getting more light poles in parks!

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #5

### Clerk's Office

*Dylan Gibson, Brittany Rodriguez, and Jordan Roberts gave the presentation on Friday, Nov. 18.*

### Notes:

- The city's main number is 303-289-3600
- The Clerk's Office number is 303-289-3611
- The Clerk's Office is responsible for passports, licensing, record keeping, elections information, City Council meetings, and the redistricting process
- Residents can register for in-person public comment up until 6:15 p.m. on the night of the meeting
- The website to sign up for the Zoom meetings is [commerce.legistar.com](https://commerce.legistar.com)
- Information on City Council meetings can also be found on city's social media
- Residents are encouraged to be a part of boards and commissions to help City Council make decisions
- There are a variety of boards and commissions and each has its own details
- The redistricting process is meant to ensure specific communities of interest stay together while following population changes

### Comments made by group:

- Many people still don't receive Connected, especially those in trailer homes
- Mention that "a big problem is fear, because the community believes that only people that can vote are the ones that can participate"

### Questions:

- Do you have to be a voter to participate in the redistricting process? – The answer is no, everyone is welcome.



# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #6

### Informal get-together

*This meeting took place on Friday, Dec. 16 in-person. There was no formal presentation, this was an opportunity for everyone to meet each other and express their concerns thus far.*

### Notes

- The group expressed wanting their children to be a part of LET someday
- The group expressed their passion for not only talking about things but also making sure they become reality
- The group hopes that the city will listen when residents want to do something in their own houses
- There is a stereotype that Hispanics/Latinos come to this country to take resources but that this group really wants to prove how they come to contribute to the greater success of the community
- How many PD officers speak Spanish? – followed up and there is a total of 13 Spanish speakers in the Police Department all with different ranks
- Trash and recycling program in the city has unclear boundaries sometimes, and there was curiosity as to the private trailer companies trash program
- Curiosity on the how to access the list of registered sex offenders
- They wanted to know details on scholarship in Commerce City

### Specific feedback from LET #4

- The City Council agendas should be available in Spanish
- Someone expressed that the bathrooms in Veterans Memorial Park needs cleaning
- There is an opportunity for educational resources such as providing first aid classes
- There is a need to connect the city's goals with the school districts
- Need for a full list of events for the year

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #7

### Community Development

*Presentation made by Building & Safety Permits representatives Elizabeth Arellano and Tiffany Long, and Code Enforcement representative Holly Hosker on Friday, Jan. 20.*

### Building & Safety – Permits (Elizabeth & Tiffany)

#### Notes:

- To see whether you need a permit or not visit the website to see the guidelines at [c3gov.com/BuildingPermits](http://c3gov.com/BuildingPermits)
- The permit application is available in Spanish and English
- The most complicated process is renovating a basement but there is a specific guide available (in spanish) at [coloradochaptericc.org](http://coloradochaptericc.org)

#### Comments made by group:

- It often feels like residents have to go through so many steps for something so simple such as getting a permit
- Many times this is because the city has to make sure that everything is safe and if something (such as location of build) is incorrect it needs to be resolved but often not with the permits division, instead with the planning division
- The planning division has a guide of where and how you can build something on your property, there is a rule that it cannot be within a certain distance from the edge of the property limit
- When residents are planning to change the structure of something in their property, they need a permit for the safety of the build, everything is to protect the homeowner
- You do not need a permit to pour concrete as long as it's not within the right of way of pedestrians, i.e. the public sidewalk

#### Questions:

- How long does it usually take for a permit to be approved – Answer: 20 days
- How can residents come together to fix a private road if it is full of pot holes but the city is said not to be responsible for its maintenance

# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #7 (continued)

### Community Development

Presentation made by Building & Safety Permits representatives Elizabeth Arellano and Tiffany Long, and Code Enforcement representative Holly Hosker on Friday, Jan. 20.

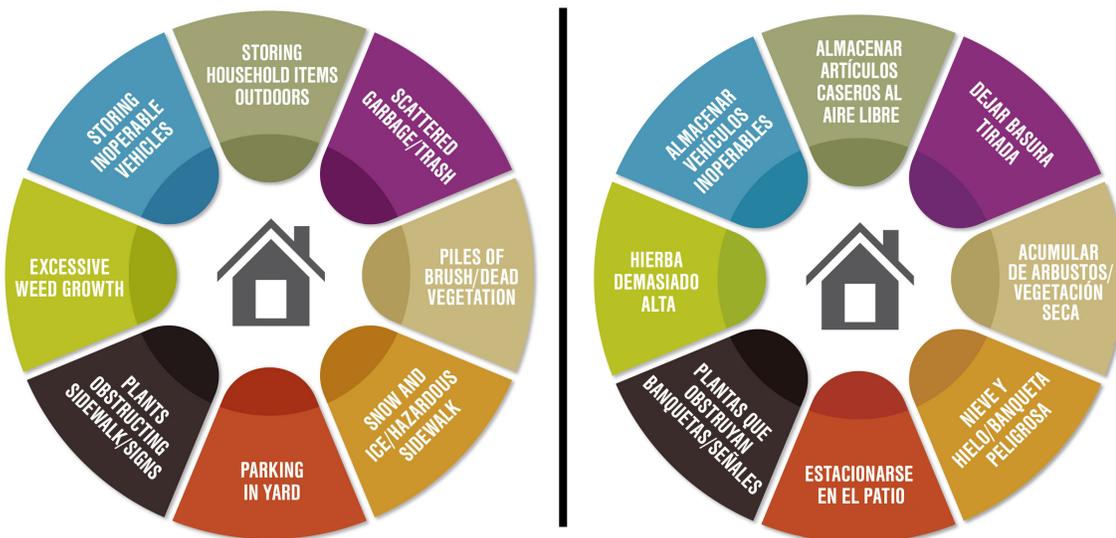
### Code Enforcement (Holly H.)

#### Notes:

- Code Enforcement exists to keep residents and business owners within the guidelines of the municipal code
- The most common violations include storing household items outdoors, excessive scattered garbage/trash, piles of brush/dead vegetation, not cleaning the snow off of public sidewalks, parking in yard, plants obstruction sidewalks/signs, excessive weed growth, and storing inoperable vehicles
- Code Enforcement issues a notice of violations, then if the violation is ignored the city may order a cleanup at the property owner's expense, and lastly there may be property liens and court summons if the violation is not addresses properly.
- When a notice of violation is made, the best thing you can do is call the inspector right away

#### Questions:

- Can Code Enforcement help within a private entity such as a senior housing facility? – Answer: Yes!



# Summary of meetings

## MEETING #8

### Tour of Bison Ridge Recreation Center

Given by Antonia Perez at Bison Ridge Recreation Center on Friday, Feb. 17

#### Notes:

- Amenities include gymnastic equipment, community pool, gym, weight room, running track, work spaces, and more.
- Three community rooms are available for residents to reserve, details on how to reserve were shared
- Details on how to get a recreation membership and personal training opportunities
- Program information is available at [c3gov.com/Register](http://c3gov.com/Register).
- Anything related to the parks, recreation, and golf department is available at [c3gov.com/Recreation](http://c3gov.com/Recreation)
- LET members were then given a conference room where they were able to carry their own conversations

#### Comments made by group:

- Many LET members expressed it was their first time visiting Bison Ridge

#### Questions:

- Are there exercise classes in Spanish for adults? - Answer: Yes, there are a variety of classes available by bilingual trainers

### Common themes repeated throughout all eight meetings:

- People are uneasy when they hear the term “city”, they feel like they aren’t welcome or that they don’t have a place but programs like LET help introduce people to these spaces
- Permits are hard to obtain, people want to do things right but it feels as though the city only puts up barriers. Additionally, residents feel as though there is no communication among internal departments when they are asked for the same thing during different phases of their permit process
- There is an urgent need to have children exposed to the real life dangers of possessing a weapon, this requires prevention and education classes for children in schools
- The use of speed bumps around school zones are needed
- The trash and recycling program feels unclear when it comes to why some people receive the benefits and why others don’t

# Conclusion

The LET #4 group was different from any others, due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, over half of the meetings were attended virtual with little participation. However, once the group met in-person you could see their willingness to open up and participate. Overall, the group demonstrated resilience and commitment to the task force.

**The following are five recommendations generated from the concerns and suggestions of LET #4:**

**Have the PD more involved in schools for proactive safety education**

**Create a plan to help with city vacancies so that residents don't feel as though they've been left without help. This could include exit surveys from departing employees who share what they were working on so the work can be reassigned**

**Improve the process of obtaining permits by creating an internal method of communication so that residents can easily walk through a clearly defined process checklist, instead of having to contact various departments, i.e., permits and planning to get a single permit completed**

**Improve greenery around the city and/or facilitate vegetation initiatives such as plant programs, planting trees, and neighborhood gardens**

**Create a new position in the city that specializes in establishing relationships with other city organizations. The person assuming the new position would work with outside partners such as the fire, water and school districts, and location organizations such as Cultivando, the Chamber of Commerce, Suncor, and more. This position would actively attend events such as board meetings and outreach events hosted by city partners to proactively bridge gaps between the city and outside entities. This position would also actively seek event and program information from outside entities as well as directly share events and programs the city is sponsoring**

**Cultivando hopes to continue their relationship with the city and to see more follow-up on the reports and recommendations that the past 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.**

## Question & Information



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