Strategic Position

Adams County has the opportunity to be a regional leader in how strategic partnerships, focused policies, and collaborative, resident-led community networks can support resilient, inclusive and sustainable communities. Collaboration is the key to creating equitable outcomes for all, and supporting a high quality of life for all residents. By supporting county-wide, collective priorities, Adams County can assist in focusing community efforts and resources to the programs, amenities, and policies that allow community organizations, businesses, and residents to collaboratively thrive.

Neighborhood Needs Assessment

A Neighborhood Needs Assessment was conducted in 2016 by the Adams County Neighborhood Liaison, with support and direction from community stakeholders, non-profits and community agencies, and residents. The Assessment evaluated survey data from the County’s 2012 and 2014 Quality of Life Surveys, Town Hall feedback, resident and stakeholder interviews, environmental scans and survey data and reports from social service providers, non-profits and community organizations, neighborhood plans, and other reports. These include, but not limited to, county reports such as the 2009 Balanced Housing Plan and Needs Assessment, and information from the County’s municipalities and external partners.

Neighborhood needs assessments draw information from multiple sources to paint a point-in-time picture of the quality of life of residents, and identify the extent to which neighborhood-level needs are being met by the County, social service providers, community agencies, and neighborhoods themselves.

This report, the first Adams County Neighborhood Needs Analysis, presents the findings of the Needs Assessment, an analysis of what’s working and what isn’t, and recommendations on how Adams County can provide leadership and support to partners county-wide to better meet the needs of residents and to promote a high quality of life.
The Neighborhood Needs Assessment yielded two predominant themes in both the extent to which neighborhood needs are met, and the various models on how needs are met in Adams County. Additionally, the assessment highlighted the long-identified (by both residents and agencies serving them, including the County) problem for Adams County residents— the three-legged stool of community identity, sense of place/belonging, and weak neighborhood networks. Residents wade through the challenges and lack of identity that comes from having a Denver/Westminster/Thornton/etc. address, paying non-resident fees to a recreation center two blocks away, getting a water bill from another entity, and trying to make sense of what it means to be an unincorporated resident.

The Assessment found that while many needs are met through a collective impact model, most collaboration in the County tends to be limited to meeting one need at a time, rather than leveraging resources across agencies to meet multiple needs in a holistic way. Additionally, the Assessment highlighted the gaps in service level and spending for a variety of needs and quality of life elements, such as early childhood education. This Neighborhood Needs Analysis bridges the understanding of the current environment for residents gathered from the Assessment, and identifies recommendations for enhanced coordination, collaboration and community support networks throughout Adams County, organized and aligned by the Board of County Commissioner’s Strategic Plan Initiatives.

From Needs Assessment to Needs Analysis & Recommendations

**Results of the Neighborhood Needs Assessment**

The Neighborhood Needs Assessment yielded two predominant themes in both the extent to which neighborhood needs are met, and the various models on how needs are met in Adams County. Additionally, the assessment highlighted the long-identified (by both residents and agencies serving them, including the County) problem for Adams County residents— the three-legged stool of community identity, sense of place/belonging, and weak neighborhood networks. Residents wade through the challenges and lack of identity that comes from having a Denver/Westminster/Thornton/etc. address, paying non-resident fees to a recreation center two blocks away, getting a water bill from another entity, and trying to make sense of what it means to be an unincorporated resident.

The Assessment found that while many needs are met through a collective impact model, most collaboration in the County tends to be limited to meeting one need at a time, rather than leveraging resources across agencies to meet multiple needs in a holistic way. Additionally, the Assessment highlighted the gaps in service level and spending for a variety of needs and quality of life elements, such as early childhood education. This Neighborhood Needs Analysis bridges the understanding of the current environment for residents gathered from the Assessment, and identifies recommendations for enhanced coordination, collaboration and community support networks throughout Adams County, organized and aligned by the Board of County Commissioner’s Strategic Plan Initiatives.

**Resident Quotes:**

“What does it mean to be part of Unincorporated Adams County?”

“Unincorporated Adams County is the step child of Adams County.”

“Where do I belong? Even recreation centers say I am a nonresident.”

“When I moved into the County, just finding where I had to pay my water bill was a challenge. There was nowhere I could go to learn about my community. It made me feel very disconnected.”

**Step 1:** Conduct an existing conditions report (environmental scan) to identify and understand:

A) Residents needs at the neighborhood level;
B) How needs are met and who meets them;
C) The role of the County presently;
D) National best practices; and
E) Solicit feedback and data on gaps and overlap from resident and provider perspectives.

-- Initial scan complete

**Step 2:** Seek input and feedback on data, methodology, findings and recommendations from community partners and residents -- Ongoing

**Step 3:** Establish framework for implementation of recommendations and updates -- Next steps
Re-Imagining of the Collective Impact Model

A community cannot thrive divided. Adams County is unique, as it has both very urban and rural areas, and must work multi-jurisdictionally to meet the needs of its residents. The County and the cities and service providers within Adams County are aware of the challenges that face their residents. Often, efforts to meet these challenges leave communities in the same county competing against each other for funding to assist residents in their shared community. What if there was a better way?

The Collective Impact Model creates an organized approach to generate a community engagement effort that streamlines resident, nonprofits, interfaith networks, businesses, schools and philanthropic/grant funding conversations around agreed upon goals and values.

The collective impact model has been used in the County for single initiatives, such as early childhood education, poverty, and youth. This analysis has found that Adams County has the opportunity to lead collaborative efforts that align single effort initiatives, and create a comprehensive collective impact effort. By convening with agencies to create a county wide vision, and supporting efforts which align with the County’s Strategic Plan, Adams County can assist in connecting and aligning the work which meets the needs of residents county wide. This has the potential to increase the community’s overall capacity to provide the amenities and services that impact the quality of life for all our residents and create an equitable “community experience” for all.

The challenge lies in the Adams County community’s ability to collaboratively come together as a unified Adams County. The graphic below represents what a Collective Impact Model for Adams County might look like.

Adams County Collective Impact Model

What is Adams County’s Role?

Adams County may be the Convening Agency that assists with establishing the:

1. Shared Community Vision
2. Evidence Based Decision Making
3. Collaborative Action
4. Investment Sustainability

This model demonstrates how aligning existing networks within the county can create a comprehensive Collective Impact Network. Working collectively by creating a county-wide set of values will open and create opportunities for:

- Enhanced data sharing and collection. Improve programming quality by data-driven continuous improvement.

- Attract funding that can increase programmatic capacity.

- Decrease programmatic roadblocks by aligning current county or city planning opportunities in a comprehensive pipeline that will increase the quality of life and engagement opportunities in Adams County.
Understanding Quality of Life in Adams County

Quality of life is difficult to measure. Community engagement is one of the primary ways in which the County both measures and may increase the quality of life of residents.

Often unspoken, our sense of home is connected to the community in which we live. Its amenities, opportunity, and characteristics can define whether we have found home or are just passing through. Adams County currently has approximately 490,000 residents; this number is predicted to nearly double by 2040. What efforts we undertake today for our community will deeply impact whether future residents, employers, and investors choose Adams County as “home.”

Over the last several years, Adams County’s Quality of Life surveys have found that overall, residents have an increased positive perspective on living in Adams County neighborhoods, but there is great opportunity to improve in many of the aspects the County measures. The 2014 survey reports that two-thirds of residents felt they have experienced an excellent or good quality of life in the County, and ratings for their neighborhood as a good place to live improved between survey years (QLS 2014). About 8 in 10 residents were at least somewhat likely to remain in the County for the next five years, or recommend living in the County to someone who asks (QLS 2014). These ratings were similar to the proportions seen in other communities in the U.S. (QLS 2014). Respondents also marked living in the County as good or excellent by 64% in 2012, and by 74% in 2014 (QLS 2014). Both in 2012 and 2014, approximately 50% of the residents surveyed felt Adams County’s overall direction was good or excellent. The Quality of Life Survey has demonstrated it has the potential to be a powerful listening agent for Adams County, and comparable year over year information will be helpful for the County.

Meaningful measurement and feedback systems such as the Quality of Life Survey and other tools described in the Neighborhood Needs Analysis are especially imperative as the County works to develop the Neighborhood Liaison Program, enhance community engagement, and support collective impact systems.

Collective Impact Model Players

**Convening Agency**
- Bring together stakeholders.
- Provide opportunity to create a shared vision.
- Supporters but NOT creators of the four conditions of collective impact.

**Backbone Agencies**
- Researchers of best practice.
- Data monitors and collectors aimed at continuous improvement.
- Champion data-driven decision-making.
- Supporters of high quality programming.
- Advocate, and recruit champions to build capacity.

**Community Agencies**
- Nonprofits, faith organizations, educational institutions, and businesses interested providing services to the community.
- Provide valuable data and real-time feedback on community needs and challenges.
- Support residents and help establish sense of community and identity.

**Funding Agencies**
- Fund efforts for backbone and community agencies to build capacity.
- Open additional opportunities for investors to fund sustainable networks.
- What funders require can either assist or derail collective efforts within a community.

*Understanding Quality of Life in Adams County*

Quality of life is difficult to measure. Community engagement is one of the primary ways in which the County both measures and may increase the quality of life of residents.

Often unspoken, our sense of home is connected to the community in which we live. Its amenities, opportunity, and characteristics can define whether we have found home or are just passing through. Adams County currently has approximately 490,000 residents; this number is predicted to nearly double by 2040. What efforts we undertake today for our community will deeply impact whether future residents, employers, and investors choose Adams County as “home.”

Over the last several years, Adams County’s Quality of Life surveys have found that overall, residents have an increased positive perspective on living in Adams County neighborhoods, but there is great opportunity to improve in many of the aspects the County measures. The 2014 survey reports that two-thirds of residents felt they have experienced an excellent or good quality of life in the County, and ratings for their neighborhood as a good place to live improved between survey years (QLS 2014). About 8 in 10 residents were at least somewhat likely to remain in the County for the next five years, or recommend living in the County to someone who asks (QLS 2014). These ratings were similar to the proportions seen in other communities in the U.S. (QLS 2014). Respondents also marked living in the County as good or excellent by 64% in 2012, and by 74% in 2014 (QLS 2014). Both in 2012 and 2014, approximately 50% of the residents surveyed felt Adams County’s overall direction was good or excellent. The Quality of Life Survey has demonstrated it has the potential to be a powerful listening agent for Adams County, and comparable year over year information will be helpful for the County.

Meaningful measurement and feedback systems such as the Quality of Life Survey and other tools described in the Neighborhood Needs Analysis are especially imperative as the County works to develop the Neighborhood Liaison Program, enhance community engagement, and support collective impact systems.

Draft Neighborhood Needs Analysis  p. 4
Aligning collaboration & coordination efforts with the Adams Board of County Commissioner’s Strategic Plan

The Adams County Strategic Plan has Five Objectives:
1. Education and Economic Prosperity
2. High Performing, Fiscally Sustainable Government
3. Quality of Life
4. Safe and Reliable Infrastructure
5. Supportive Human Services

In addition to developing a Collective Impact Model to match the County’s unique resident needs, environment, and existing resources/networks/agencies, the Neighborhood Needs Analysis also describes the Neighborhood Liaison Program by the five objectives of the Adams County Strategic Plan. For each of the Objectives, the Needs Analysis presents information on existing conditions, challenges and opportunities, and an action plan moving forward. Finally, the Analysis presents resident-led best-practices for community engagement and development to strengthen the community networks in Adams County. The biggest themes to emerge from the Analysis in terms of community engagement are presented below:

Community Engagement Opportunities Identified by Needs Analysis

**YOUTH COUNCILS**
Youth are underutilized resource within the County. Engaging youth has multiple benefits for both the youth involved and the community. Youth councils engage youth in community service in their neighborhoods, teach leadership skills, connect youth to one another, and support and build upon existing Cradle to Career networks.

**CIP COLLABORATIVE**
Resident disconnect—how does input become built projects? Approaching the County’s Capital Improvement Program through a multi-disciplinary and collaborative approach has the opportunity to promote efficiencies, leverage resources, and allow for more informed decision-making and transparency.

**MARKETING & BRANDING**
How we communicate is just as important as what we communicate. What does it mean to be a part of Adams County? Answering this question and working with experts to review County marketing and branding efforts may assist residents with community identity and feelings of membership.

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**
Tailor this national program to Adams County by starting with one pilot neighborhood. Use social media and friendly competition to highlight program and neighborhood efforts to generate excitement for other neighborhood groups to apply. This creates opportunities for county-level engagement and creates a collective neighborhood/community network.

**ENHANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
Find new ways to reinvent the community meeting and engage residents. Work with Anythink Libraries on a variety of neighborhood “pop up” events. During these social events residents, can share opinions on items such as “I want to see _ in my community” and answer questions like “Community means...” Partner with multiple community organizations.
Adams County Neighborhood Liaison Program

The Neighborhood Liaison has the unique perspective of working with the internal and external facing departments within the County and observes how seemingly compartmentalized efforts affect the broader community. This position also receives feedback from residents, businesses, cities, and community organizations on Adams County’s external services and processes. Through this work, the Neighborhood Liaison is able to provide strategic recommendations to strengthen the County’s ability to collaboratively serve residents by providing attainable action steps that will begin generating Adams County’s community engagement network.

The Neighborhood Liaison work program is also informed by the results of the Neighborhood Needs Assessment, and the recommendation of the Neighborhood Needs Analysis for stronger community engagement networks and collective impact systems. The resulting work plan to guide the implementation of the Needs Analysis for 2017 is briefly presented below:

- **TOWN HALL COLLABORATIVE:** Work across departments and with community organizations to create comprehensive reports that highlight community needs, successes, and overall information in preparation for Town Hall Meetings for Board of County Commissioners. Then generate snapshot reports for community.

- **HISTORIC COLLABORATIVE:** Work with CU capstone student to create interactive historic social story map of Brighton and SW Adams County. Enable residents to identify with historic aspects of community. Helping residents identify with community through history. This collaboration will help create a platform for a community hub to help residents identify with their neighborhood and community.

- **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE:** Work with Anythink Libraries on a variety of neighborhood “pop up” events. During these social events residents, can share opinions on items such as “I want to see__ in my community” and answer questions like “Community means...” Partner with community organizations and Neighborhood Services as well so that additional resources and personnel can meet community residents during these events. This will assist the County in finding new ways to reinvent the community meeting structure, and find new ways to engage residents.

- **YOUTH COLLABORATIVE:** Work with ACYI and community partners to strengthen cradle to career initiatives. Foster conversations and convening’s that provide opportunity to unify collaborative goals and values. Find ways to work together and integrate with community organizations committed to these goals. County currently has youth initiatives in the works to help engage with both career and neighborhood level opportunities.

- **SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBORHOODS:** Bring this program to one pilot neighborhood and use social media to highlight program and neighborhood efforts to generate excitement for other neighborhood groups to apply. This creates opportunities for neighborhood and County-level engagement and also creates a collective neighborhood network.

- **NEIGHBORHOOD GRANTS:** This year we are able to offer mini grants to assist with neighborhood clean ups, block parties, pop up events and more. These events are aimed at funding initiatives that promote engagement opportunities and community pride. These are supportive funds for residents to create engagement events in their neighborhood.

- **MEET AND GREET EVENTS:** Instead of traditional neighborhood meetings, we are looking at having fun events that will enable neighbors to meet each other and county staff. This has the potential to organically spark conversation and momentum around community collaboration, and will utilize Anythink Libraries “Pop Up” events to help residents find other residents living within their neighborhoods.