

Group Living: Open House and Feedback

Prepared by the Group Living Project Team, March 2020, revised April 2020

Overview

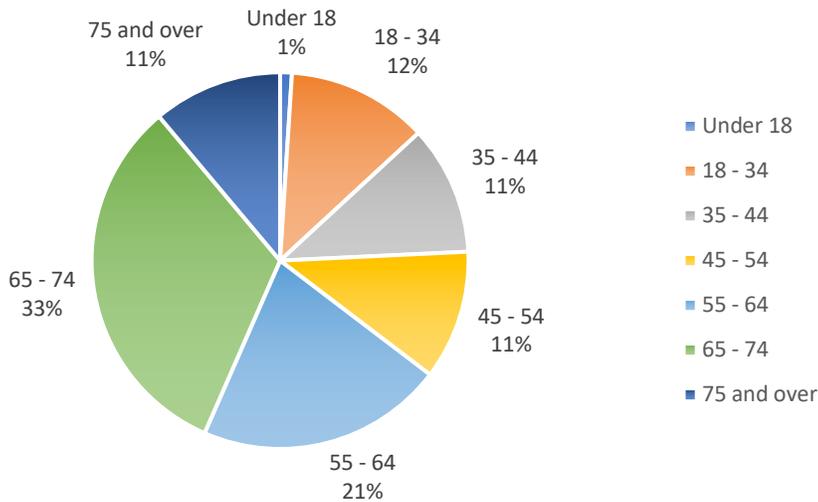
This document provides a summary of the hundreds of e-mails, written comments and other input received by the Group Living project team since the beginning of public outreach in January, including four open house events.

Open Houses

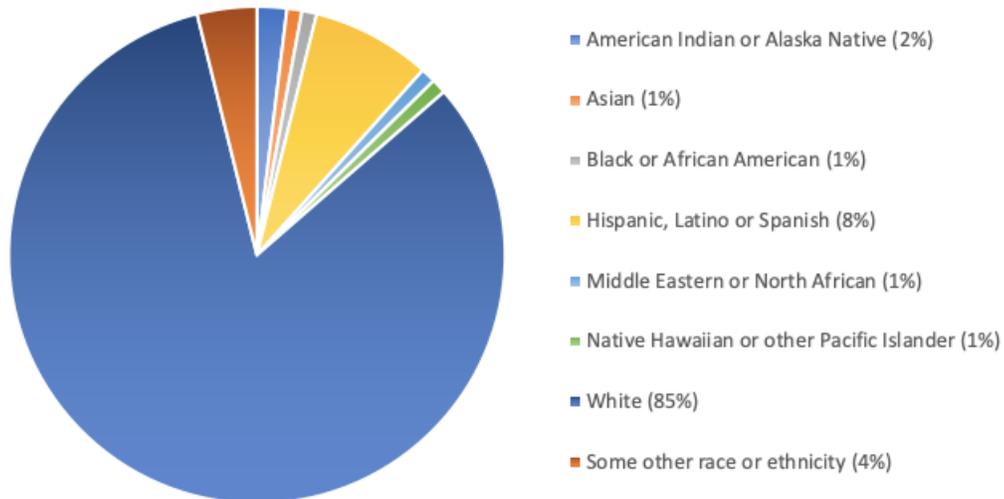
The project team held four open houses in different areas of the city. Three were on weeknight evenings, and one was on Saturday morning. At the open houses, attendees read and discussed display boards summarizing the proposals with project staff and Group Living Advisory Committee members, listened to a 25-minute presentation followed by an open forum. Comments were recorded by the project meeting facilitator. Attendees were also encouraged to write their input on a guided form or on an index card.

A total of about 550 people attended the forums. Of those, 349 participated in a voluntary survey of demographic information. Of attendees who completed the demographic survey, 85% identified as White/Caucasian, 8% identified as Hispanic, Latino or Spanish and 1-2% identified as some other ethnicity or race. Attendance was evenly divided between men and women, and trended toward older adults – 53% were between the ages of 55 and 74.

Age of Open House Attendees Who Completed Demographic Survey



Race/Ethnicity of Open House Attendees Who Completed Demographic Survey



Other Outreach

Along with the open houses, project staff also reached out to organizations and advocacy groups representing affected populations, including the Denver Womens Homeless Initiative, Mothers Advocating for Affordable Housing, the Denver Commission for People with Disabilities, Enterprise Community Partners, Servicios de la Raza and the GES (Globeville Elyria-Swansea) Coalition. Staff also presented to approximately 25 registered neighborhood organizations and the Denver Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation between January and March. Demographic information was not collected during these outreach efforts.

Feedback Received

Feedback Forms

222 attendees filled out feedback forms that asked if they supported, could live with or did not support proposals for updating regulations for conventional households, residential care facilities and congregate housing.

- 148 people who filled out feedback forms said they did not support proposed changes to how household uses are regulated
- 117 said they could not support proposed changes to residential care uses
- 105 said they did not support proposed updates to congregate living uses
- 65 people said they supported or could live with proposed changes to household regulations
- 84 said they supported or could live with proposed changes to residential care regulations
- 82 said they could live with or support proposed changes to congregate living uses.

Written and Spoken Feedback

As of late April, 2020, staff had recorded 281 e-mails and 212 comments either written on notecards or spoken at meetings and recorded by the facilitator. Comments on the proposed zoning updates:

- about 88% of e-mail and written comments are opposed to some proposed changes, primarily those related to household and residential care regulations.
- About 11-12% of email and written comment support most or all of the proposed changes.
- about 70% of comments heard at open houses are opposed to some proposed changes, primarily those related to household and residential care regulations.
- about 30% of comments heard at open houses support some proposed changes, primarily those related to household and residential care regulations.

Support For Proposed Changes

Feedback Themes:

- Flexibility and adaptation to the way people commonly live
- affordability
- equity for people who are not related by blood

Sample of comments (Note: a separate document containing all comments received is available at the project website: www.denvergov.org/groupliving):

- **Cross-Disability Coalition:** “We urge responsible City officials—including members of the Denver City Council and Denver Planning Board—to respond to the many community-identified problems with current rules and adopt the proposed slate of updates to Denver Zoning Code’s residential use regulations.”
- **Mothers Advocating for Affordable Housing:** “Making these changes will help everyone: young people who want to live with multiple roommates, people of all generations who want to live in co-housing or co-op communities, and families with young children who would benefit from some extra helping hands.”
- **Individual resident:** “This has been a serious problem for the longest time here, and doesn’t reflect the needs of non-standard families like those with multiple generations living together.”
- **Individual resident:** “Allowing unrelated people, especially single moms w/ kids, to live together could help reduce homelessness and loneliness at relatively little cost.”
- **Enterprise Community Partners:** “Increasing the number of unrelated people who can live together from the current limit two would dramatically increase options for those looking to save on housing costs and live in community by sharing a single household.”
- **Individual resident,** on the topic of people she knows who are sharing housing: “For the sake of equity, it doesn’t make sense to continue pretending that these living situations don’t exist.”
- **Individual resident,** expressing a dissenting opinion from members of West Washington Park Neighborhood Association: “[The proposed changes] appear designed to improve

equity and flexibility to ensure housing options for vulnerable populations. These are goals that reflect the very values and outcomes for which this city must strive. ... We request that this letter and position be given the appropriate consideration commensurate with consideration given to unelected and wholly unaccountable self-appointed representation.’”

Opposition to Proposed Changes

Key issue 1: Updates to Household Regulations:

Feedback Themes:

- Concerns that allowing more unrelated adults could cause an increase in crime, lack of maintenance and less availability of off-street parking
- Changing neighborhood character
- Concern about unscrupulous landlords, commercialization of residential neighborhoods
- Strain on trash, sewer and other resources
- Concern about representation on the Group Living Advisory Committee
- Concern that allowing more people in larger houses could lead to “worst-case scenario” homes of 20 or more people
- After mid-March, some commenters expressed concern that more unrelated people permitted to live together would hamper pandemic response.
- Many commenters indicated that allowing up to 8 individuals to live in houses up to 1,600 square feet sounds like “too many,” Approximately half of the input indicates support for some lower number, such as 4, 5 or 6 unrelated adults, with 4 being the most common suggestion.

Sample of comments related to proposed changes to how Denver regulates households (Note: a separate document containing all comments received is available at the project website: www.denvergov.org/groupliving):

- **Individual resident:** “This is far too extreme...it will further lessen quality of life in Denver”
- **Individual resident:** “Your proposals would ruin the neighborhoods that we have invested in and cared for over the years. It would bring in more cars and more traffic. As a single older woman, I feel that you are putting my personal safety at risk.”
- **Individual Resident:** “If people want to live in specific places, they can work hard and be patient until they can afford to live there.”
- **West Washington Park Neighborhood Association:** “Very few persons on the Group Living Advisory Committee appear to be representatives of registered neighborhood organizations or their constituents.”
- **Wellshire Homeowners Association RNO:** “...we have an affordability problem when it comes to housing. [But] this proposal does not address the true systemic causes or solutions.”
- **Individual Resident:** “Please do not destroy the character of Denver neighborhoods to appease investment property owners looking for profits by cramming people into a single family home. The resident homeowners should be your priority”.

- **Individual Resident:** “the family unit is already disappearing and you want to further denigrate it by trashing our neighborhoods by accommodating those who choose to ‘live in a different way’.”
- **Individual Resident:** “...we will not just stand by and watch the destruction of the family-oriented purpose of our core neighborhoods.”
- **Individual Resident:** “If you want this change to allow people who cannot afford housing let them in your neighborhood, NOT mine. This will bring crime and antisocial behavior into neighborhoods where decent people who worked hard to buy their homes live. It will drastically reduce property values and change the character of good neighborhoods.”

Key issue 2: Updates to Residential Care regulations that would allow Community Corrections services in more zone districts:

Feedback Themes

- Concerns about safety
- Notification of neighbors
- Concerns about impact on property value

Sample of comments related to Residential Care Proposals, specifically Community Corrections (Note: a separate document containing all comments received is available at the project website: www.denvergov.org/groupliving):

- **Individual resident,** described self as retired police officer: “As a law enforcement professional for 24 years I can tell you that creating additional outlets and opportunities are not the solution. People don’t need more opportunities they to work within the opportunities which already exist.”
- **Individual resident:** “...please do not remove residential care categories. Residents should have the right to zone out dangerous facilities such as halfway houses not be forced to live next door to them.”
- **Individual resident:** “Neighbors need to be consulted (not just informed) before each and every new placement. These homes should not be able to pop up anywhere, surprising the surrounding property owners and residents.”
- **Individual resident:** “now you would impose another danger to the neighborhood. How would we know who is living here and what they did? This would also effect the value of our homes and I don’t believe that many decisions made by the city truly take homeowners under account.”
- **Individual resident:** “Despite their potentially well-meaning missions, halfway houses bring criminal activity into neighborhoods. That is why the City prohibited new halfway houses from beginning operations in Denver residential neighborhoods a decade ago. That has not changed.”

Next Steps

Staff is reviewing the feedback received, in the context of adopted city policies that guide land use regulations. This summary and a document containing all feedback will be provided to the Group Living Advisory committee and is available on the project website:

www.denvergov.org/groupliving. Staff will create draft Denver Zoning Code language based on an updated proposal informed by the feedback received and will post it for public review for at least 30 days. The public review period will be followed by a public hearing by the Denver Planning Board, the first step in the legislative review process required for all zoning code text amendments.

Staff will notify the public on any further steps involving public input, particularly in light of the impact of the city's COVID-19 response.