Denver’s Climate Action Community Conversations

Thematic Summary of Responses from Round 1: Challenges

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DENVER CLIMATE ACTION, SUSTAINABILITY & RESILIENCY

and

Civic Consulting Network
Executive Summary

I. Overview
The primary purpose of the MIB method is to engage community members in meaningful discussion with their peers, led by their peers and community leaders. This vibrant discussion environment offers the ideation, critical thinking, and collaborative context necessary for a community to arrive at the best solutions and decisions possible, not to identify the statistical significance of a single word or opinion. We believe this is a unique and powerful opportunity for public participation.

Some diverse audiences were reached during this first round of MIBs, but it was certainly not at the breadth expected to truly elevate the participation of the entire community. The focused distribution of the kits to those already involved in the Task Force process in some way, might be the key reason this came to be. The raw demographic data collected by the survey is presented earlier, uninhibited by further interpretation (p. 3 – 5).

II. Sentiments About the Climate Crisis
While in general there was a clear sense of urgency among all participants across demographics to take action (see p. 6 for more), three respondent personalities (and in some way group personalities as most meetings seemed to have only one or two personality types gathered) began to emerge at this point in the surveys and conversation summaries:

- **The everyday community member**, familiar to the issue of Climate Change, unsure about what to do about it or what others should be doing about it beyond some personal action, and ready to gain more education or understanding about what to do next.
- **The confident community member**, feeling content in the everyday actions of reducing impact such as composting, recycling, utilizing alternative forms of transportation by choice, gardening, talking about the climate crisis, and questioning why others and the City aren’t already doing more to change and address impacts.
- **The expert community member**, arriving to these discussions well prepared with scalable solutions, and/or with an intimate understanding of how efforts in mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency would impact their business or way of life, and a general skepticism about the overall Climate Action process, with a robust eagerness to participate in the process at a more advanced and meaningful level.

III. Transitioning Homes and Businesses
Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5 when asked about the importance of transition, the average rating for this question was a 4, indicating high importance, though not full consensus on the issue.

**Themes included:** 1) it’s not enough and not soon enough, coupled by doubt that it could be accomplished no matter what the timeline, 2) concern about the negative impact to residents and 3) concern about the negative impact to certain industries, and 4) a “no resistance” theme which immediately turned to solution-oriented conversations.

Participants were asked how easy it would be to transition their homes to all-electric heating. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being impossible, and 5 being no problem at all. The
average rating for this question was under a 3, identifying that it would be harder than it would be easy to make this transition. Most skepticism in the comments relate to cost, time, and knowledge about ‘how to.’ Challenges were distributed amongst five options given.

IV. Transportation
Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5 when asked about the importance of transitioning transportation, the average rating for this question was also just over a 4, indicating high importance, though once again, not full consensus on the issue.

Themes included: 1) the cost of solutions, 2) the scalability of solutions, 3) inclusiveness amidst options, 4) equity, 5) the need for a range of more robust and diverse transportation solutions, and 6) the importance of recognizing that different methods of transportation are a need for some and a privilege to others (those that have to take the bus and those that can choose to take the bus).

Participants were asked how easy it would be for them and their families to travel only by electric vehicles, public transit or people-powered modes. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being impossible, and 5 no problem at all. The average rating for this question was once again just under a 3, identifying that it would be harder than it would be easy to make this transition. Skepticism in the comments section relate to convenience, accessibility and availability, knowing options, equitable distribution, cost and expense to implement and for individuals, needing larger vehicles for work, frequency of charging stations, safety issues, and the challenge of changing personal habits. Challenges were distributed amongst the six options given.

V. Resource Efficiency
Quantitative data was not collected about the importance or perceived challenge of this category, but similar themes were seen that appeared in earlier sections including: 1) this is needed and doable, 2) incentivize Commercial Real Estate owners and developers to pursue greener buildings, and 3) challenges of implementing these measures, with cost as a particular barrier, and regulation as a potential carrot. The deeper dive into the overall challenges associated with all potential initiatives further describes this section as well.

VI. Challenges
Participants were asked, “considering the potential future, what challenges might these initiatives mean for you and/or within your households and for your communities? As well as your business or your place of work?

Challenges that were identified included:

- **Individuals**
  1. Options must be affordable and meet individual needs,
  2. There must be engagement and buy in,
  3. There needs to be education and we must raise awareness,
  4. How do we get people to change their habits, and
  5. Recognizing that raising taxes for lower income citizens should be avoided.

- **Systemic**
  1. How to fund it ... expensive and [we] have limited financial resources,
2. While there is an "appetite" to be part of the solution, there is an unwillingness for new taxes without addressing the regulatory barriers,
3. There will be systemic barriers for low to middle income residents,
4. The need for a diversified workforce,
5. Regulation and incentives despite a lack of resources, and
6. The potential negative impact on industries such as being punished for a truck fleet hauling solar panels.

**VII. Opportunities**
The responses to the opportunity questions were extensive and comprehensive, far too much to adequately capture here in a summary of summaries, but some predominant themes are important to highlight:

1. An abundant and dedicated energy to ensure that the right solutions are put into place with a sense of urgency
2. A table of contents for a climate-conscious lifestyle
3. The bigger, more complicated issues are still overwhelming and it appears that until we get more engagement with these simpler tasks it is hard to think about how to move forward
4. The paradigm needs to be flipped: Make the environmental thing to do the easiest and cheapest
5. Opportunities seemed to focus on community benefits - building neighborhood strength, collaboration, simplifying lifestyles, and [reducing] stress
6. It remains that unless the most marginalized are included, they will be left out and left to bare the brunt of the changes
7. In terms of opportunities, there is potential if we do this right to have a more connected and equitable society.

**What Facilitators Can Do Next**
A myriad of feedback has been offered about the MIBs to better design and facilitate the process for Round 2 and future versions of this method. Much of this is being incorporated into that design for Round 2. There was one particular response that seemed noteworthy for current and future facilitators, which we will work to address in the design as well, “*there was concern that only those who are already active are taking part in these kinds of discussions. We are wondering how to engage someone new. Maybe at our next meeting ask each person to bring someone new who they think is not as engaged.*”

**Conclusion and Next Steps**
Among the nearly 250 people who participated in the first round of these meetings, the outlook for taking impactful climate action is daunting, to say the least. The heavy lift that is needed to make an impact is made even more challenging by looming questions about whether any of our efforts will make a difference. Given that the impacts we seek grow more challenging the longer it takes to get to aggressive action and following the spirit of one group that “focused on HOW to achieve [the transition],” the next step is to consider how to reach the goals the task force identifies, ideally including plans to overcome the array of challenges identified in the first round, including: cost and affordability for all; convenience, availability and accessibility of options; information about options and how to participate; safety, and the needs of specific groups.
Overview

In February of 2020, Denver’s Climate Action Task Force, with the help of the Civic Consulting Network, helped mobilize the first part of its public engagement strategy, Meetings-in-a-Box (MIBs). MIBs are a nationally recognized engagement model used to reach and connect with community members that often don’t engage in public meetings. By mobilizing the meetings into the hands of community members instead of only offering a limited set of public meetings at a certain place and time, participation is increased, along with ownership of the process.

MIBs have proven to be an effective method for engaging a broad, diverse set of community members, especially people whose voices are often under-represented. Some diverse audiences were reached during the first round of MIBs in this project, but it was not as diverse as hoped to truly elevate the participation of the entire community. The focused distribution of the kits to those already involved in the process in some way might be the key reason this came to be. The raw demographic data collected by the survey is presented uninhibited by further interpretation (p. 3 – 5), so that Task Force members can form their own opinions about where additional focus might need to be emphasized when planning for other parts of the strategy (much of which is already being considered as planning for public meetings and other focused group discussion continues).

Following the demographic information, this report takes a closer look at the themes that emerged during each of the four parts of the MIB conversations. These themes were unearthed through careful reading of every facilitator summary and every comment in every survey. For further redundancy, any submitted photos of discussion boards were investigated to be sure that identified themes were what individuals and groups were documenting during the process as well. This latter method truly proved to be redundant.

By using the words and summaries quoted directly from participants in surveys and facilitator summaries, we hope to accurately describe the overarching themes that arose during the 28 confirmed MIBs that drew at least 247 participants¹. While not every individual comment nor every summative paragraph can be included in a brief thematic summary, we brought forward those quotes that seemed to not only speak for themselves but many others as well. We hope that by complimenting direct quotes from participants and facilitators with the more quantitative data presented by certain questions asked in the survey, less of the information is skewed by subjective analysis.

Last, it is critically important to understand that both the MIB process and the data collected were not designed for coding to achieve a statistical analysis. The primary purpose of MIBs is to engage community members in meaningful discussion with their peers, led by their peers and community leaders. This vibrant discussion environment offers the ideation, critical thinking, and collaborative context necessary for a community to arrive at the best solutions and decisions possible, not to identify the statistical significance of a single word or opinion. We believe this is a unique and powerful opportunity in public participation.

¹ This is the total number of opened surveys. The consultant team anticipates more attended meetings without opening a survey and that more meetings were held than what’s accounted for in summaries.
I. Trends in Participation

It’s important to remember that Meetings-in-a-Box are not a one-size-fits-all method, and these small group discussions are part of a broader public engagement strategy. Some of these sectors are represented on the task force and in Stakeholder Advisory / Affinity Groups, while others will likely have a higher participation rate at public meetings. Two questions to ask: 1) Are we engaging under-represented groups? 2) If not, how can we build on this baseline of participation? In other words, who do we need to make extra effort to reach in the next round of MIBS, in affinity group discussions and at public meetings, and what are the best ways to do that for each identified group?

Sector Representation

Keep in mind that in this question one participant could self-select representing more than one sector. No one sector represented a majority, though 32% of participants represented some type of nonprofit or public entity, and more than 1 in 4 participants represented parents of young children. As shown in Figure 1, the remaining groups could be divided into two categories:

1. Sectors represented by 13 – 25% of participants = Energy industry, local workers, environment and conservation advocates, and health workers.
2. Sectors represented by 10% or less of participants = Real estate and development, transportation, faith communities, people with varying abilities, people with compromised immune systems, and people experiencing homelessness, and ‘other’ which included students, educators, and agricultural.

Figure 1. Sectors Represented
Other Demographics
Figures 2-6 further describe characteristics of the people who participated, presented without interpretation.

Figure 2. Age Representation

Figure 3. Education Levels

Figure 4. Income Distribution
Figure 5. Participation by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latinx</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple races</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
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<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Zip Code Representation (Range ~ 80239 = 3 participants, 80206 = 19 participants)
II. Sentiments About the Climate Crisis

After watching the videos, participants were asked how worried they were about climate change. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating was a four, with the median at 4.25. This was represented in the discussions and sticky notes by words with negative connotations such as fear, anxiety, depression, frustration, crisis, daunting, doom, hopeless, and helpless. Given the nature of the videos, many survey responses highlighted general climate change, natural disasters, and ocean related issues (sea level rise and severe hurricanes) within the category of the “two things that most worried them.”

It is important to note at this point in the summary that the content of the videos disrupted the small group conversations. While there was a general sense of urgency and despair about climate change, there was also:

- a sense of **frustration at the perceived level of inaction** by city leaders (and the need to raise the issue to the top),
- **ambiguity** about what is actually happening in Denver (what’s happening now versus what is proposed or being considered), and
- general questioning about whether efforts can be appropriately enacted in a timely manner.

Some of these conversations also expressed a need to better highlight the urgency of the situation, skepticism about the focus on individual actions in the videos as opposed to the larger more systemic actions that are needed, and a **call for broader education about the topic, especially about the impacts of climate change specific to Denver and Colorado.**

While in general there was a clear sense of urgency among all participants across demographics to take action, three respondent personalities (and in some way group personalities as most meetings seemed to have only one or two personality types gathered) began to emerge at this point in the surveys and conversation summaries:

1) **The everyday community member**, familiar to the issue of Climate Change, unsure about what to do about it or what others should be doing about it beyond some personal action, and ready to gain more education or understanding about what to do next.

2) **The confident community member**, feeling content in the everyday actions of reducing impact such as composting, recycling, utilizing alternative forms of transportation by choice, gardening, talking about the climate crisis, and questioning why others and the City aren’t already doing more to change and address impacts.

3) **The expert community member**, arriving to these discussions well prepared with scalable solutions, and/or with an intimate understanding of how efforts in mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency would impact their business or way of life, and a general skepticism about the overall Climate Action process, with a robust eagerness to participate in the process at a more advanced and meaningful level.
This is by no means to limit the nuance, variability, or broad diversity represented by nearly 250 participants. Instead, these three respondent personalities might offer some way to consider the varying levels of experience and knowledge coming to this process, and the different ways they might be engaged now and in the future. It is also a way to see the interconnected lives of the community and to highlight the complex solutions needed.

III. Transitioning Homes and Businesses

Importance
Participants were asked during the conversation and in the survey how important it was for transitioning homes and businesses to be heated by electricity from renewable energy. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating for this question was a 4, with the median at 4.5, indicating high importance, though not full consensus on the issue.

One discussion leader summarized their conversation by noting their agreement that it’s “necessary but it seems like a big change. How can we get there? Feeling that 2050 is too long to wait, but skepticism we can even get there by then.” This juxtaposition that it’s not enough and not soon enough, coupled by doubt that it could be accomplished no matter what the timeline, best characterized many of the responses during this part.

For example, one participant asked, “what happens to all the old gas appliances?” Similarly, another group of expert community members observed, “as a group of extremely energy conscious people who work with the electric utility, I think this was a major point of contention. While we all see the value of converting to electric, many of us saw the potential for waste, and potential inefficiencies in achieving efficiency through converting to electric.”

Yet another group commented similarly that there’s, “not enough infrastructure; not large enough labor force; time consuming and costly to homeowners and business owners; interference in private life while construction happens; causes a lot of new materials in the dump.” Not only did these responses point out skepticism about the system to implement the transition, but it also began articulating another common theme about the impact to Denver residents and different members of the community.

One group’s comments and questions underscored the theme of impact to residents, which was echoed by others, “Will there be assistance to help low income? I worked hard for my house and car: I know you aren’t asking me to give up something that I spent all my life trying to
obtain? It might be possible for ‘young folks’ to bike and walk, but I have to keep my job to pay my bills. What happens if electricity goes out? What are back-up plans for folks?”

A third theme looked more closely at the impact on specific industries, when one facilitator pointed out that it was “not practical for restaurants who prefer to cook on fire,” while another group similarly pointed out the “many problems within the restaurant industry for this.” It seems these conversations could be drawn out more during Round 2 when similar groups are asked to define what supports they might need to make the transition, or how else they can be incentivized or supported to make the switch.

Last, a fourth theme could be characterized as “no resistance,” which immediately turned to solution-oriented conversations. This theme is best demonstrated by a facilitator summary that wrote their group was, “focused on HOW to achieve [the transition]. People need more information about how to do it and what is the cost. They talked about all the older homes in Denver and the need for tax incentives or rebates in order for people to be able to afford the full total cost; the need for regulations to require all new development to be electric.”

Challenges
Participants were asked how easy it would be to transition their homes to all-electric heating. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being impossible, and 5 being no problem at all. The average rating for this question was under a 3, with the median at 3, identifying that it would be slightly harder than it would be easy on average to make this transition. Though there might be a ‘will’ for this transition, as identified in the ‘importance’ section above, it is not perceived as an easy action or strategy to undergo without knowing more about the support systems. Most skepticism in the comments relate to cost, time, and knowledge about ‘how to.’

A look at the distribution of the reasoning for this rating helps tells more of the story of why this would be difficult (see Figure 7 on next page). Participants were able to choose more than one reason when asked, “If any, what challenges would you face in making this transition in your home?”
IV. Transportation

Importance

Participants were asked how important it was for using all electric vehicles and creating more robust transit options. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, the average rating for this question was also just over a 4, with the median at 4.5, indicating high importance, though once again, not full consensus on the issue. A closer look into the quotes and comments from the discussions might illuminate some of the nuance and doubt in these responses.

One facilitator summary likely captured it best, “while this was agreeable, there was an insistence in evaluating cost and scalability,” and “how this can be made inclusive.” The themes of cost/scalability and inclusivity run through the responses for this question as well. Additionally, this facilitator wrote, “while Denver has an opportunity to lead nationally on this front, how do we do so in a framework that prioritizes the most impactful work and takes into account existing priorities.”

Participants underscored the needs for equity in considering electric vehicles by observing, “EVs are only an option for a small number of financially-able people.” Another asked, “how will EVs be made more affordable for all?” And that while diverse “transit is a great option, it needs to be more frequent, reliable, and take people where they need to go.” This
recognizes the third major theme found in these conversations, the need for a range of “more robust” transportation solutions, including making current options more reliable and accessible, and how we will “invest in approaches to change behaviors so people use [public] transit more.”

One particular conversation illustrated the privilege assumed in owning personal cars, thus recognizing the need for diverse solutions: “All but one of the participants used mass transportation, (the RTD bus). None of these women using RTD owned a car. The one exception was a woman who stated that she would love to use mass transit but she needed to be at work at a certain time and must use her car for work-related travel during the day. This drew an immediate response from other participants, ‘Riding the bus is not a luxury for us. It’s how we have to get around.’”

**Challenges**

Participants were asked how easy it would be for them and their families to travel only by electric vehicles, public transit or people-powered modes. Using a slider on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being impossible, and 5 being no problem at all. The average rating for this question was once again just under a 3, with the median at 3, identifying that it would be slightly harder than it would be easy on average to make this transition.

Congruent with the outcomes of the questions about transitioning to electricity, though there might be a ‘will’ for this transition, as identified in the ‘importance’ section above, it is not perceived as an easy action or strategy to undergo without knowing more about the support systems that will be put into place or how a diverse set of options will be handled. Skepticism in the comments section relate to convenience, accessibility and availability, knowing options, equitable distribution, cost and expense to implement and for individuals, needing larger vehicles for work, frequency of charging stations, safety issues, and the challenge of changing personal habits.

A look at the distribution of the reasoning for this rating helps tell more of the story of why this would be difficult (see Figure 8 on the next page). Participants were able to choose more than one reason when asked, "If any, what challenges would you face in traveling only by electric vehicles, public transit or people-powered modes?"
V. Resource Efficiency

During the discussions, participants were asked about their thoughts regarding resource efficiency including better-insulated buildings and efficient water use. Overall, sentiment and responses during this section of the conversations seemed positive, with slightly less confusion about how it would even be possible. One group of confident community members even reflected, “100% support. All believed this is the first thing we should do.” And another facilitator summarized that their group felt, “obviously, this is needed and doable.”

However, that same group noted that it’s “hard to retrofit old buildings.” And other groups echoed this sentiment and concerns, by asking and observing, “how do we not only retrofit existing buildings (and leverage a skilled workforce) but how does Denver incentivize Commercial Real Estate owners and developers to pursue greener buildings that are not only healthier for occupants and the community, but as solar makes clear, bring them financial value?”

A group of expert community members carefully observed, “again, as people who work in energy efficiency, we strongly advocate for these measures to be implemented. However, as millennials and homeowners, we saw the challenges of implementing these measures, with cost as a particular barrier, and regulation as a potential carrot.” As has been seen in earlier sections of the conversation, concerns about cost, incentives to offset cost, a need for understanding how things might be implemented, and how different communities throughout Denver would be impacted rose to the surface quickly.

Other groups dove deeper into the systemic challenges at play. Resource and product chains, and the complex impact of any changes were concerns that came up in this section of the discussion again and again: “FOOD SYSTEMS are not in Denver. Our transportation, our appliances, all of these things are brought in from outside Denver. Create more industry HERE ... part of resource efficiency is putting the supply-side back in Denver. Companies coming into Denver, few ship out. How to create more industry to produce more HERE and not bring it in?”

A related, and more in-depth documentation of these challenges can be seen in the following sections.
VI. A Closer Look at Challenges

Since the focus of this first round of Meetings-in-a-Box was about identifying challenges, more time was spent during the conversations exploring the nature of these challenges than what was represented in the survey questions. While there is some redundancy to the responses above specific to transitioning to electricity and new transportation options, the quotes that emerged from this portion of the conversations are important to share.

Participants were asked, “considering the potential future, what challenges might these initiatives mean for you and/or within your households and for your communities?” The following is representative of responses recorded:

“The options must be affordable for people to actually implement. Options must also meet the individual needs of people.”

“Our group feels that the biggest challenge is engaging the citizenry. We feel that our group did not represent Denver and that there are a lot of people who are not engage or do not care about these issue for all kinds of reasons. You even see this in Boulder where city council pushes something but the person remodeling their house does not what to do xyz because of added cost or other reasons. So the biggest challenge is engagement and buy in.”

Challenges include: "the lack of resources, how to educate people, how to fund it, how to get people to change their habits."

Challenges include: “Cost, ability to pay for it, and raising taxes for lower income citizens. Raising awareness about why the city would do these programs. Getting people to individually participate.”

“The efforts to live more sustainably are expensive and [we] have limited financial resources. Recycling resources are more readily available in some neighborhoods (e.g., curbside pickup for discarded items in more prosperous neighborhoods) while [many of us] need transportation to travel greater distances to recycling centers.”

“What happens if a storm knocks out electrical grid? Food cut off? Does City have a plan for designated available spots in EVERY community that will share resources: energy saving, emergency calls, clean water, food agents with local access?”

Participants were also asked, “considering the potential future, what challenges might these initiatives cause for your business or your place of work?” The following is representative of responses recorded:

“Fear that the identified actions would be too small and meaningless. While there is an "appetite" to be part of the solution, there is an unwillingness for new taxes without addressing the regulatory barriers (building codes), land use policies and decisions that preserve climate-damaging single-family home zoning that also limit the effectiveness of public transportation (low density is a public transit negative).”

“COSTS, barriers for low to middle income.”

“We need a workforce to meet the needs of that new economy.”

“Conversion to electric has expensive upfront costs. This may be a difficult measure without regulation and incentives.”
“From a culture standpoint, even small measures like water conservation, energy saving, require habit changes in both business and residential population.”

“Worried that the lack of [EV] trucks currently on market will mean they will be punished for their fleet that is necessary for hauling solar panels to job sites.”

“Cost and human labor: might need to lay-off people to afford to do these expensive changes. May have to close business for a while during construction.”

VII. Opportunities

In an effort to close this first round of Meetings-in-a-Box conversations at a transition point to Round 2, participants were asked, “What are residents already doing? What are the opportunities of these initiatives?

There were 356 comments in the survey responding to this last question which offered a set of open-ended text boxes, backed by comprehensive paragraphs in the Facilitator Summaries, pictures that could not capture all of the sticky notes on the discussion boards, and additional pages of notes submitted outside of the intended data collection methods. The responses here were not only about opportunities, but a general repository for anything that was not covered by the questions asked or the conversations shared.

Many of these responses reflected the three-respondent/group personalities described in part 2, while also re-iterating and re-stating many of the themes that were discussed during earlier sections of the conversations. This demonstrated a high level of advocacy for ideas and points of view shared, and a collective commitment to the topic, matched by an abundant and dedicated energy to ensure that the right solutions are put into a place with a sense of urgency.

In addition to a consistent mention of solar, the responses read, rightfully so, like a table of contents for a climate-conscious lifestyle:

Energy efficient appliances • Small conversion of lawn to native plants • Small growing of own vegetables • LED lights • Smart system watering • Filtered water on shower heads • Filtered water in kitchen – no water bottles • Recycling • Compost through city • Metered showers • Smart heating and cooling thermostat • Automatic lights off system when not in the room • Building an app that shares eco-friendly products, behaviors, services and getting points for using them- verification system with scans of bar code upon purchase. • Neighborhood Block competitions with rewards for most positive changed behaviors. • Getting Registered Neighborhood Organizations more involved in outreach at events, in facilitating meeting that can be shared with the city for transforming communities, by getting city speakers or other professionals to discuss changes being made, new practices being implemented. • Car share throughout neighborhoods - Companies that pick up employees with their fleet.

Others were more focused, but got at the same point, “[The group] already uses public transit, lives in high density housing and composts. [The group] believes they are doing more than the average person.” And some offered yet another layer of self-awareness about their individual contributions, “This was a group of people who take climate and pollution seriously. Almost everyone drives electric or hybrid vehicles. High RTD use. We all compost and work to reduce our water use. We could have gone on for a very long time and didn’t think it was worth our time.”
Several groups tackled similar lists of activities, "The belief here was to start with the small attainable things: removing single use plastics from our lives, stop accepting plastic bags and bring your own (bag, bottle, ... create a can tax), trying to be more energy conscious and efficient. Composting and recycling. Figuring out markets other than China for our waste," etc. but then moved to the greater dilemma, stressed and discussed by many groups throughout the entire conversation, "the bigger, more complicated issues are still overwhelming and it appears that until we get more engagement with these simpler tasks it is hard to think about how to move forward."

In considering how to scale individual actions beyond those already involved, another response offered, "People are good. They are well-intentioned, and many will go out of their way to do what they feel is right. They will even inconvenience themselves to a degree. But a huge problem is that the most environmental/climate worthy actions are difficult while damaging actions are easy to do. The paradigm needs to be flipped: Make the environmental thing to do the easiest and cheapest."

Meanwhile, an opportunity with an overall theme of strengthening neighborhoods and communities emerged. Representing several others, one group offered, "opportunities seemed to focus on community benefits - building neighborhood strength, collaboration, simplifying lifestyles, and [reducing] stress." The hope that the Climate Action plan could potentially strengthen Denver and its many neighborhoods and communities was clearly on numerous participants' minds.

Additionally, several groups and responses also underscored the access, ability, and equity involved in responding to the climate crisis. A facilitator summarized, "[there was] a huge focus on transportation, commute and quality of life. That said, there was the recognition of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how there is privilege in being able to respond." Another group similarly offered, "Large parts of this conversation revolved around societal and cultural adaptation. There will be greater emphasis on neighbors helping neighbors, hopefully, and moving away from a conversation of scarcity to abundance. But it remains that unless the most marginalized are included, they will be left out and left to bare the brunt of the changes." This concept came up in the closing several times and, as hopefully demonstrated in this summary, occurred at several points throughout the discussions.

One particular answer stood out in its brevity and profundity that likely gets at the intention of just about everyone that participated, "in terms of opportunities, there is potential if we do this right to have a more connected and equitable society."

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

Among the nearly 250 people who participated in the first round of these meetings, the outlook for taking impactful climate action is daunting, to say the least. The heavy lift that is needed to make an impact is made even more challenging by looming questions about whether any of our efforts will make a difference. Given that the impacts we seek grow more challenging the longer it takes to get to aggressive action and following the spirit of one group that "focused on HOW to achieve [the transition]," the next step is to consider how to reach the goals the task force identifies, ideally including plans to overcome the array of challenges identified in the first round, including:

- Cost and affordability for all,
- Convenience, availability and accessibility of options,
• Information about options and how to participate,
• Safety, and
• Needs of specific groups.

On this last point, to be thorough in our understanding of the challenges facing Denver community members if they are to be full partners in taking action on climate change, we need to ensure that we are hearing from everyone. Therefore, the immediate next step should be identifying who else needs to be reached in the next round of community discussions and how best to do so, while also identifying the specific questions various groups need to be asked to understand how solutions can be developed best to meet that full array of needs.