



INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager
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Date: June 7, 2022

Subject: Information Item: Safe and Managed Public Spaces Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 27, 2021, the multi-departmental Safe and Welcoming Spaces team presented Council with a pilot program to improve the city's effectiveness in managing Boulder's public spaces. During the Study Session, the team proposed the establishment of a city cleanup team and increasing presence in public spaces to enhance coexistence between the unhoused and the housed communities that use these spaces and to ensure spaces are safe and welcoming for all. This increased presence involved the piloting of three programs:

- A downtown ambassador program, developed with the Downtown Boulder Partnership;
- An Urban Ranger program; and
- A dedicated Boulder Police Unit to support these teams and to provide a higher level of safety in the downtown area.

While challenges have continued during the past year, the team has made several advances in its approach to safe and welcoming spaces. These advances include:

- Establishing an internal operations team that has collected 106 tons of debris and has addressed 389 camping sites since February 2021.
- Implementing the Downtown Ambassador program that has allowed for:

- Increasing a sense of safety by providing a consistent uniformed and trained presence.
- Providing a resource for business owners, employees, and community members in the Downtown and on the Hill for addressing low-level public space issues, reducing demand on Boulder Police Department Staff.
- Building relationships with individuals who regularly inhabit downtown to better understand needs and align with support when possible.
- Initiating an Urban Park Ranger Program, with presence to begin June 2022.
- Police added 2 additional full time positions (Police Officers) to the encampment cleanup team.
 - This will allow for an increased number of cleanup days as well as increase ability for outreach and community engagement
- Identifying holistic program goals and associated metrics
- Creating a structure to ensure outreach and services to residents of camps and transitioning the service to a Coordinated Entry-connected approach
- Improving reporting and community response mechanisms
- Creating and deploying Standard Operating Procedures
- Locating and establishing storage options for people displaced from closed encampments

BACKGROUND

As homelessness has been increasing nationally, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and there continues to be no comprehensive Federal response to the issue, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness continue to make Boulder their homes. Despite countywide success in the provision of housing and services, the landscape of people living in public spaces does not change: for each person that is successfully entered into supportive housing or reunified with their support system, another person arrives in the city. Without a robust Federal response, resource availability varies widely from community to community. Most communities of 50,000 people or less have no resources for homelessness assistance, and most communities under 200,000 in population have minimal resources dedicated to the issue. Consistent with the City of Boulder Homelessness Strategy, Homeless Solutions for Boulder County (HSBC) – a countywide partnership tasked with policy decisions related to single adult homelessness – has been able to leverage resources to house approximately one person per day in the four and a half years it is has been in existence. In fact, HSBC provides significantly more housing and services than is typically provided in a county the size of Boulder County. As a result, a mobile and well-connected unhoused population often travels to locations such as Boulder to capitalize on opportunities. Fifty-five percent of all people who have been screened through Coordinated Entry have self-reported that they had been in Boulder County for less than six months at the time of their screening, and 59.7% of people screened in the first three months of 2022 reported to be new to the community.

Coupled with a consistent inflow of people experiencing homelessness, the community has also seen a troubling trend with regard to mental and behavioral health. Data from Coordinated Entry, HSBC's front door screening aimed at people who are either new to homelessness or new to the community, reflects that the people arriving to the community are more likely to have long histories of homelessness and significant behavioral health issues. Inequities in mental health, substance use treatment, primary health care, and educational opportunities lead to real and

substantial barriers to housing for people, often leading these individuals to self-medicate with readily available and cheap substances. There is then often a higher involvement with the criminal justice system and addiction that can exacerbate efforts to rehouse individuals.

The topic of homelessness has proven polarizing in Boulder, with members of the Boulder community expressing opposing and passionately defended opinions about camping, and the people who are camping in public spaces. At the heart of the issue is the balance between protecting public spaces for all people who wish to use them and ending homelessness for the people who most need housing solutions. Substance use and often associated mental health issues not only impact an individual's ability to obtain or retain housing, but also lead to many of the conditions currently found in Boulder's public spaces: erratic behavior that can threaten other people in public spaces, improperly discarded drug paraphernalia, unused and/or vandalized public restrooms and human wastes in inappropriate places, hoarding behavior leading to accumulation of intertwined personal belongings and refuse, and increased criminal activity.

Since early 2020, an interdepartmental staff team has applied a strategic approach to safely and compassionately clear camps in public spaces. The aim of the team is to mitigate the impact of camping in floodways, drainageways, and high hazard zones while addressing hazardous materials and conditions in public parks and playgrounds. All work is also centered on the idea that people experiencing homelessness deserve compassion and should be informed of available options to living in camps.

On April 27, 2021, the staff team presented the issues to council and proposed the establishment of an internal operations team tasked with public space reclamation. With exponential increase in the amount of trash and debris associated with camps, and the risks to the environment, contracting with a third party was becoming an untenable and unreliable response. Focusing resources on a five-person internal team allowed for more flexibility in response, more efficient use of limited financial resources, and more consistency in cleanup approach among parks, open space, and flood and drainageways.

In addition to the operations team, the task force requested the pilot of measures aimed at improving the safety and welcomeness of public spaces, beyond just encampments. These measures included the establishment of an Urban Park Ranger program, a Downtown Ambassador program in partnership with Downtown Business Partners, and a dedicated Police team to support the collective efforts of these groups.

ANALYSIS

Progress on Stated Objectives/New Programs

Council approved \$2.2 million for the pilot programs. With the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and the national staffing shortage, some initiatives have progressed quicker than others. However, significant progress has been made in establishing the infrastructure needed to operationalize these programs.

Figure 1 outlines the budgets for the pilot programs, as proposed to Council in April 2021, and associated expenditures.

Activity	Expense Type	2021			2022				Total		
		Budget	Expenditures	Remaining Balance	Budget	Actual Expenditures Through 4/30	Projected 5/1 -12/31 Expenditures*	Remaining Balance	Total Pilot Budget	Total Expenditures (Actual and Expected)	Total Expected Remaining Balance
Internal Operations Team (Utilities)											
	One Time Expense	\$ 230,000	\$ 211,147	\$ 18,853	\$ -	\$ 18,030	\$ -	\$ (18,030)	\$ 230,000	\$ 229,177	\$ 823
	Ongoing Expense	\$ 245,000	\$ 262,548	\$ (17,548)	\$ 300,000	\$ 162,356	\$ 174,614	\$ (36,970)	\$ 545,000	\$ 599,518	\$ (54,518)
	Serv Pro Services	\$ 170,000	\$ 93,337	\$ 76,663	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	Reduction in Serv Pro Services	\$ (170,000)	\$ (76,663)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (170,000)	\$ (76,663)	\$ -
	Total	\$ 475,000	\$ 490,369	\$ 77,968	\$ 300,000	\$ 180,386	\$ 174,614	\$ (55,000)	\$ 605,000	\$ 752,032	\$ (53,695)
* 2022 Projected 5/1 -12/31 Expenditures includes personal property storage costs											
**Serv Pro budget corrected from 4/2021 proposal to reflect actual operations											
Downtown Ambassadors (Community Vitality)											
	OneTime Expenditure	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -
	Ongoing Expenditure	\$ 286,000	\$ 296,418	\$ (10,418)	\$ 572,000	\$ 605,484	\$ -	\$ (33,484)	\$ 858,000	\$ 901,902	\$ (43,902)
	Credit from Grant or DBP Support	\$ (100,000)	\$ (110,418)	\$ 10,418	\$ (200,000)	\$ (233,484)	\$ -	\$ 33,484	\$ (300,000)	\$ (343,902)	\$ 43,902
	Total	\$ 196,000	\$ 196,000	\$ -	\$ 372,000	\$ 372,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 568,000	\$ 568,000	\$ -
Urban Park Rangers (Parks and Recreation)											
	One Time Expenditure	\$ 10,000	\$ 1,223	\$ 8,777	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 19,116	\$ (19,116)	\$ 10,000	\$ 20,339	\$ (10,339)
	Ongoing Expenditure	\$ 62,000	\$ -	\$ 62,000	\$ 124,000	\$ -	\$ 137,932	\$ (13,932)	\$ 186,000	\$ 137,932	\$ 48,068
	Security Savings	\$ (10,000)	\$ -	\$ (10,000)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ (10,000)	\$ -	\$ (10,000)
	Total	\$ 62,000	\$ 1,223	\$ 60,777	\$ 124,000	\$ -	\$ 157,048	\$ (33,048)	\$ 186,000	\$ 158,271	\$ 27,729
Dedicated Unit (Police Department)											
	One Time Expenditures	\$ 114,000	\$ -	\$ 114,000	\$ 159,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 159,000	\$ 273,000	\$ -	\$ 273,000
	Ongoing Expenditures	\$ 385,944	\$ 112,865	\$ 273,079	\$ 843,644	\$ 68,382	\$ 269,211	\$ 506,051	\$ 1,229,588	\$ 450,458	\$ 779,130
	Total	\$ 499,944	\$ 112,865	\$ 387,079	\$ 1,002,644	\$ 68,382	\$ 269,211	\$ 665,051	\$ 1,502,588	\$ 450,458	\$ 1,052,130
Safe and Managed Space Pilot Totals		\$ 1,232,944	\$ 800,457	\$ 525,824	\$ 1,798,644	\$ 620,768	\$ 600,873	\$ 577,003	\$ 2,861,588	\$ 1,928,762	\$ 1,026,163

Fig. 1: Pilot Programming Budget and Expenditures

Hiring status and detail concerning expenditures are discussed below within each pilot program update.

Downtown Ambassador Program

The ambassador program has been very successful in recruiting and retaining a good core of team members. While there has been some turnover, acceptable staffing levels have been maintained throughout the pilot so far. The ambassador’s scope of services include the categories of hospitality, safety, and cleaning. Since the pilot began, the team has performed more than 50,000 hospitality contacts, 10,000 business contacts and nearly 3,000 welfare checks. They’ve eliminated more than 4,500 instances of graffiti, picked up nearly 800 bags of trash, and cleaned up biohazard waste from more than 100 humans and other animals. Should the program continue beyond the pilot period, additional support is needed for University Hill coverage and for dedicated outreach to the unhoused community.

Additional in-kind support is being provided by the City’s Central Area Improvement District (CAGID) in the form of office and storage space and by the Downtown Boulder BID in the form of program management and administration and vehicles and equipment.

Internal Operations Team

As of August 2021, the internal operations team has been fully staffed with a five-person crew, which includes a supervisor. The team has also been fully equipped with vehicles and dump trucks and other equipment to support the team’s work. The team has collected 106 tons of debris and has addressed 389 camping sites since February 2021.

The operations team performs cleanup activities 5 days per week. On average, one or two of those cleanups involve active camp sites and the work is performed with police support to ensure the safety of all involved, including people living in the camping areas. The remaining days of the week, the crew inspects and cleans the creek corridors and greenways without police support and hauls off dump truck loads of trash. As a new resource, this team's work on cleanup allows maintenance employees to perform their duties taking care of parks, utilities, and other city infrastructure and assets across the city which augments the value of this resource – especially considering labor shortages that are impacting maintenance functions in the city.

The team works collaboratively with representatives of other city departments and takes pride in performing the work with compassion and empathy. Part of the notification process involves providing the people living in the camps with information on available services. The notification process, as well as other aspects, such as uniform system of identification, storage, and retrieval of personal property are guided by standard operating protocols developed by the multi-departmental Safe Management of Public Spaces (SAMPS) team and city leadership.

Dedicated Police Unit

Two officers were added to the Public Spaces Enforcement Team on May 4, 2022. Up until then support for camping cleanup has been provided by the HOT/Mall Unit Sergeant and officers from the Mall Unit. The department anticipates adding a third officer later this spring or summer when new officers complete field training. Forming a six-officer team dedicated to camps and public spaces has been delayed due to the ongoing staffing shortage facing the department. BPD currently has 29 vacant police officer positions.

The goal of the dedicated Police unit is to support the work of the SAMPS team, rather than to issue citations. Similar to the clean up team, officers provide a compassionate approach to service and provide information about resources and shelter options. This unit also connects people they encounter with the Homeless Outreach Team or other appropriate outreach personnel.

Urban Park Ranger

In the fall of 2021, and recognizing lack of capacity to stand up a new program with existing resources, staff determined that a Lead Ranger was necessary to stand up this program thoughtfully and carefully. After several hiring rounds, a Lead Ranger joined the city in May 2022 and is focused on ensuring appropriate Standard Operating Procedures, communication protocols, and training (such as de-escalation) are provided to support this program. Several temporary rangers are being hired and trained and the program will begin operations in June 2022. The urban park rangers will contribute to progress towards several goals related to safe public spaces, including ensuring access to public spaces is not impeded, that visitors have access to knowledgeable resources on city services, protecting waterways and natural areas, and user perceptions of safety.

It is intended that by the fall and as council discusses the 2023 budget, staff will share outcomes related to the first summer of operations.

BTHERE

While established prior to the April 27, 2021, request, Boulder Targeted Homeless Engagement and Referral Effort (BTHERE) plays a critical role in outreach to people experiencing

unsheltered homelessness. Begun in late 2020, the city contracted with TGTHR (formerly Attention Homes) to provide a team of three people and a supervisor, who would engage with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Originally piloted as a response to COVID-19, this team - consisting of a team member with lived experience in homelessness, a team member with knowledge of or connection to mental/behavioral health resources, and a team member with general homelessness outreach experience – was charged with providing education about public health issues, distributing masks, connecting people to testing and vaccination opportunities, and screening people to determine if a stay at the COVID Recovery Center was necessary. In addition to COVID-related activities, this team attempted to connect individuals to Coordinated Entry (CE) and encourage connection with housing, service, and sheltering opportunities.

In December 2021, TGTHR informed the city that it would not be moving forward beyond the pilot, as this work was outside of TGTHR's focus and they had challenges in staffing the team. In 2021, the BTHERE program was inconsistent in both staffing and outreach. This change in service provider allowed the city to reassess the BTHERE team structure, and it provided the opportunity for incorporation of the BTHERE program into the Coordinated Entry (CE) program. Incorporation of the BTHERE program under CE allows the system to maintain a brick-and-mortar CE experience but also allows for in-field CE screening and diversion/reunification services. As Boulder Shelter for the Homeless (BSH) is contracted with both the City of Boulder and Boulder County for CE services, and is the only provider to provide a full range of service offerings including coordinated entry assessments and case management services, the BTHERE program was incorporated into the existing BSH contract.

This program under BSH is fully in place and actively engaging with individuals camping in public spaces throughout the city. They are also working to expand data collection methods so that information can be correlated with that of other SAMPS programs.

As with the other programs discussed in this document, the BTHERE team performs other duties outside of just outreach to those camping. The BTHERE team is also focused on unsheltered homelessness throughout the community and connecting people with housing, sheltering, and other supportive services. The ability to conduct CE screening in the field also means that the BTHERE team members have the ability to reconnect people to support systems outside of Boulder and to more seamlessly connect people to shelter case management services.

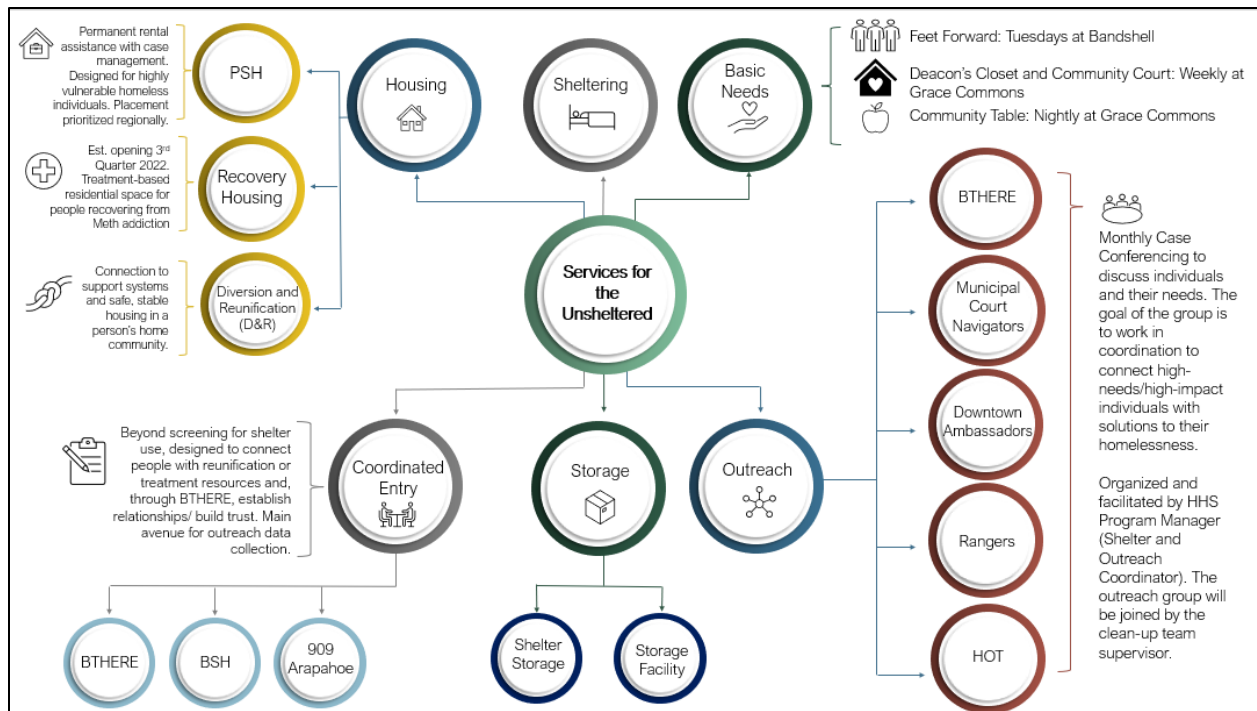


Fig. 2: Homeless Services Related to Encampments

Measuring Pilot Program Outcomes

It is important for us to be clear that individuals experiencing homelessness in public places is not the issue. However, the day-to-day living and belongings – tents, clothing, bicycles, shopping carts, etc, -- that some individuals are storing in the floodplain, public areas or rights of way pose a significant hazard and in many cases impede access for all the public to enjoy.

Removal of an encampment is done as a last resort when the occupants show themselves to be resistant to services and refuse to vacate. Committed to compassion, we issue multiple soft notices in advance of a formal notice. With each round of notice, we attempt to engage people in resources. The cleanup day is the last step of a long process and still includes outreach and information on the variety of service offerings that exist in our community. Vacated residents may take their belongings with them, and city crews address any remaining items.

It is the policy of the City of Boulder to legally and compassionately prevent and disband camps as quickly as possible to avoid harm to the inhabitants, the broader community, as well as public spaces and natural resources. To support the goal of compassionately preventing and disbanding camps as quickly as possible, a multi-departmental team established a set of outcome goals and associated metrics. These goals are aspirational, and in many cases, they will be difficult to fully achieve. Future communication with council on program process will focus on trends and challenges. The desired long-term outcomes of the program are:

1. No unsanctioned camping in public spaces
2. Individuals experiencing homelessness are connected to Coordinated Entry services
3. Access to public space and public infrastructure is not impeded
4. Reduction in crime and disorder in designated areas of emphasis
5. Visitors have access to knowledgeable resources or city services
6. Maintenance crews are able to safely access critical infrastructure in public spaces
7. Waterways are free of contamination

8. Users of public space report feeling safe and welcome.

Goal 1: No Unsanctioned Camping in Public Spaces

After a brief decline in early 2022, April and May reports of camping have risen significantly beyond 2021 levels. Increased reports may have more correlation with increased communication to the public as to where to report encampments than in the number of encampments. Reports that have been captured through the Inquire Boulder system are reflected below.

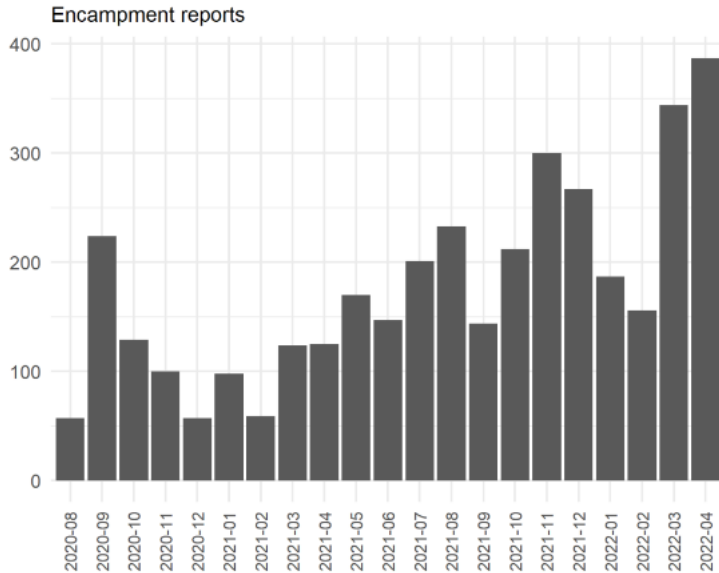


Fig.3: Number of Encampment Reports: sourced from InquireBoulder

However, the number of structures (i.e., tents, tarps) in camps inspected by the clean-up team has also increased in recent months.

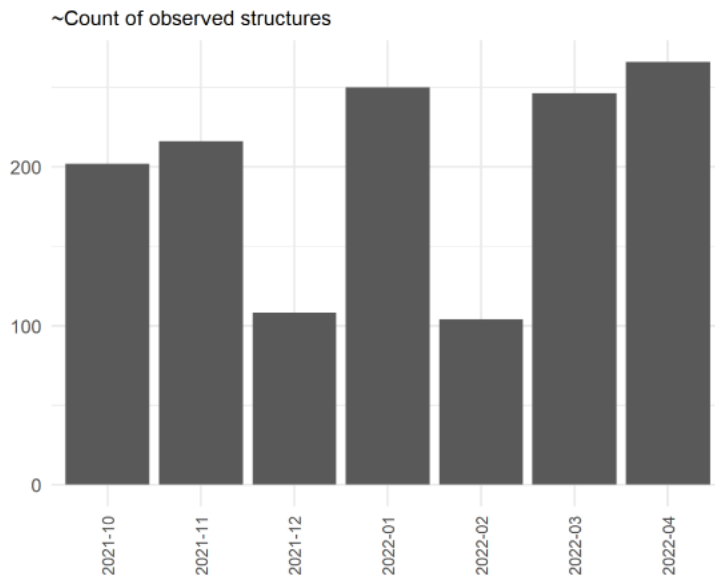


Fig. 4: Identified Structures: sourced from operations team reports.

There are two clear concentrations of encampments and clean-ups: along Goose Creek and along Boulder Creek/Civic Center. In the graphic below, yellow dots indicate clean up events, which are informed by the prioritization framework staff follows, and black dots represent reported camp sites. This chart is available on the website mentioned above, and users have the ability to scale the map and to adjust time periods.

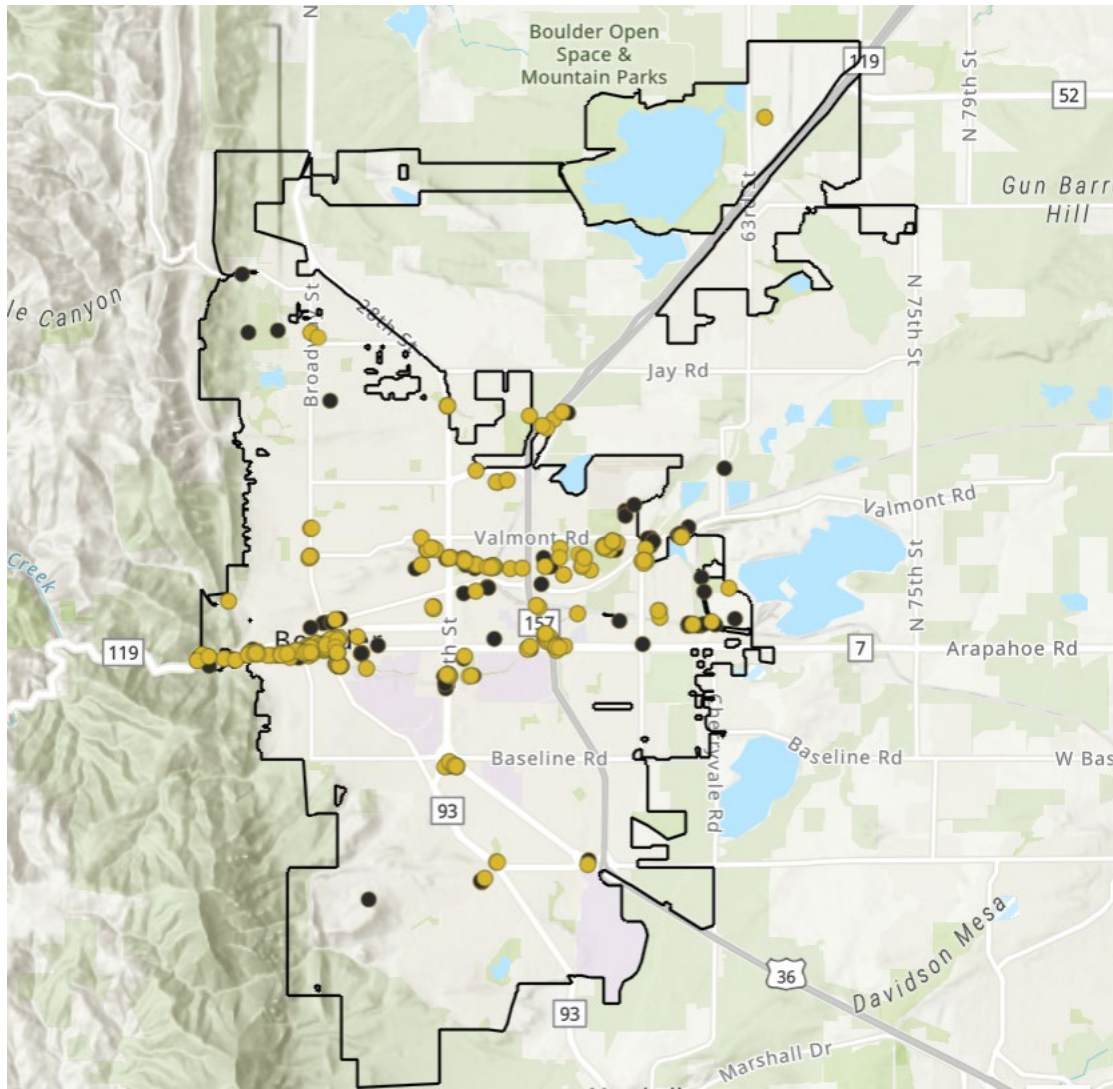


Fig. 5: Year to Date Reported Encampments and Clean-Up

Goal 2: Individuals Experiencing Homelessness Are Offered a Connection to Coordinated Entry Services.

With the transition of B THERE services from TGHTR to Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, measurement has been paused. As a result, the data from the B THERE teams is only through December of 2021.

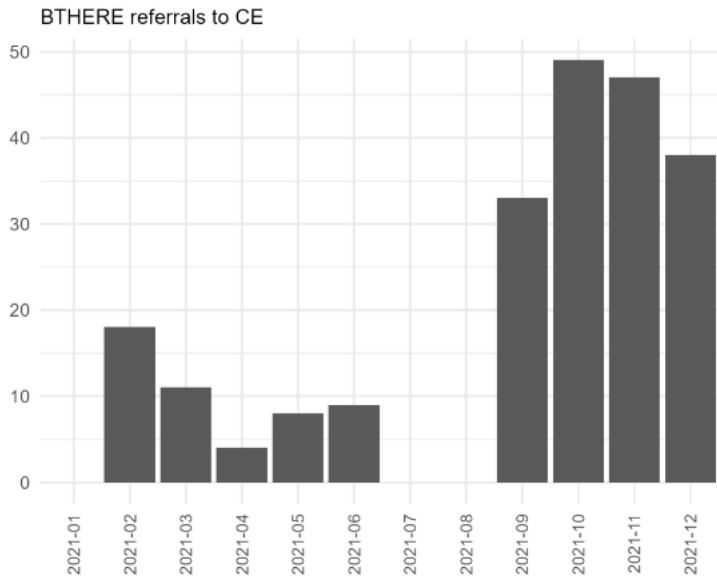


Fig. 6: BTHHERE Referrals to Coordinated Entry, sourced from TGHTR reports. Note that data ends in 2021.

As this team’s primary responsibility is to build trust with people experiencing homelessness in order to ultimately persuade people to engage with services and housing, there is an inherent challenge in obtaining information and making referrals. An industry rule of thumb is that it takes up to 17 interactions to lead to engagement. As such, referrals to Coordinated Entry are often a small portion of the interactions that this team has with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

The team is working to develop reporting tools for BTHHERE and to ensure that information is effectively and efficiently gathered. Reporting is expected to resume in second quarter 2022. As part of the transition to BSH, BTHHERE is now part of the Coordinated Entry team and will be able to administer Coordinated Entry services in the field, increasing a camping resident’s access to sheltering or reunification services.

Goal 3: Access to Public Space and Public Infrastructure is not Impeded

Public access issues are identified at sites inspected by the operations team in approximately 15% of cases. Monthly community bike volumes (as measured by bike counters) at locations near high-concentration downtown areas continue to increase year-over-year, however.

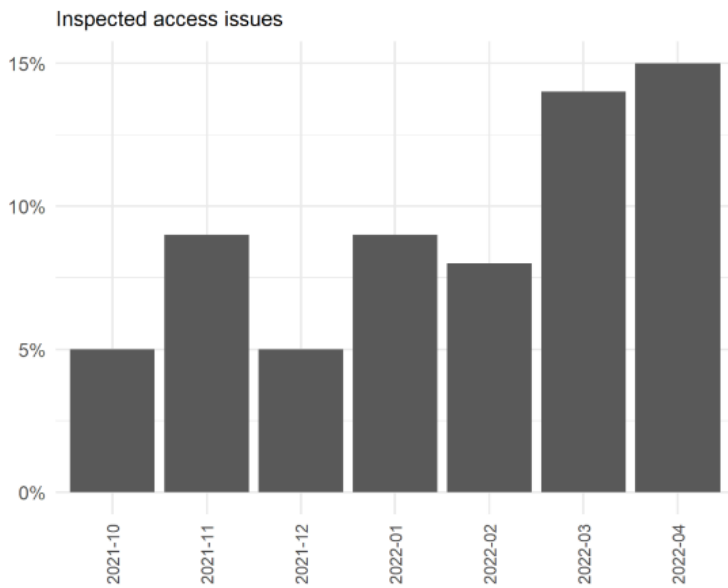


Fig. 7: Proportion of sites inspected leading to public access issues sourced from operations team reports.

One key metric in measuring accessibility of public spaces is to monitor the volume of use of public spaces by bicyclists.

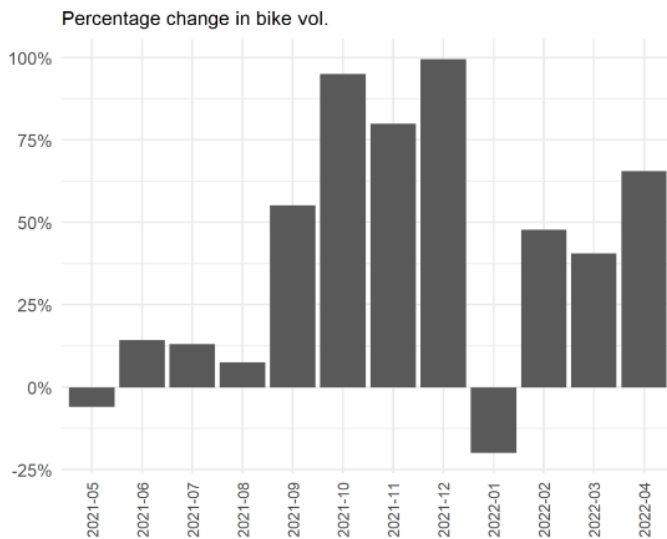


Fig. 8: Bike volume on paths at 13th & Walnut and Folsom & Boulder Creek path: data sourced from bike counters.

Goal 4: Reduction in Crime and Disorder in Designated Areas of Emphasis

A major goal of the Safe and Managed Spaces team is to reduce crime in key locations of the city. Currently, calls for service in these high-encampment zones is increasing. As the dedicated

Police unit and the Urban Park Ranger programs come online, it is expected that these programs will have an impact on calls for service.

BPD calls for service in the areas that also see high volumes of encampment reports are trending upwards year-over-year in recent months.

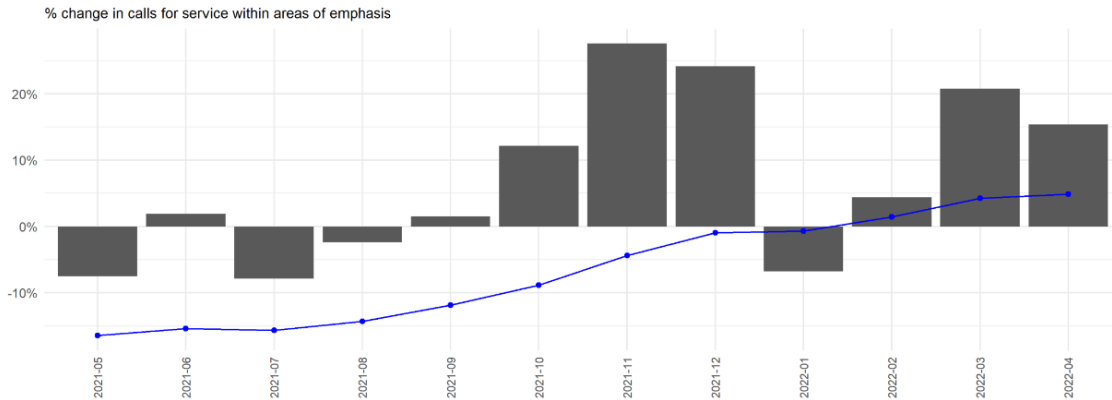


Fig. 9: Boulder Police Department Calls For Service Trend. Data sourced from CPD CAD system. Note – the blue line shows cumulative change over the past twelve months. Monthly columns measure the change between the month and the same month in the prior year.

Goal 5: Visitors have Access to Knowledgeable Resources or City Services

Ambassadors are recording a large number of public safety-related activities, particularly in addressing graffiti and safety concerns such as debris or broken glass.

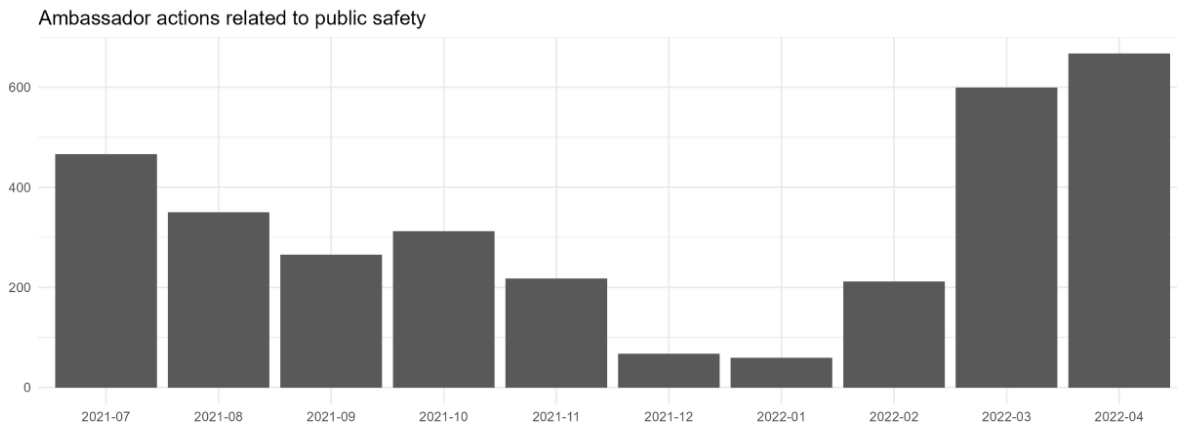


Fig. 10: Count of Ambassadors actions related to public safety – data from Downtown Boulder Partnership

Data support for this initiative has taken the form of supporting three priorities:

With growing interest in the efforts of the team and with the pilot programs coming to full strength, the data and communications team is focused on ensuring:

- 1) **Consistent data collection.** The team has worked with each department working in the field – such as PD, Internal Operations Team, OSMP, CV, Parks and HHS – to

- align data collection and reporting through an internally-developed application. The team is also supporting external agencies to improve their reporting capabilities.
- 2) **Public activity reporting.** The team created a [website and dashboard](#) to display [encampment reports](#) and work on cleanup efforts. The public can monitor locations of camping reports and can also obtain information on the amount of debris collected, number of assessments/inspections conducted, and clean-ups completed.
 - 3) **Internal operational and summary reporting.** The team has created internal operational and summary dashboards that support operational decision-making and program oversight.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to refine measurement, operations, and reporting processes and update the public facing dashboard. Staff will also perform an analysis of the resources required to expand the activity of the internal cleanup team beyond the flood and drainageways and, if warranted, will bring forward a proposal as part of the annual budget process.

The SAMPS team will continue to work on increasing the integration of the work with the Urban Park Rangers and establishing the outreach case conferencing in the summer. The team will update the dashboard monthly and will provide an IP to council every six months.