



**The Downtown Boulder Partnership (DBP) supports reopening West Pearl Street (between 9th and 11th streets) to vehicular access as soon as possible, while continuing to consider options to repurpose streets and public spaces throughout the downtown district.**

The City of Boulder's swift response to COVID-19 impacts in 2020 included initiatives that provided much needed support for businesses, such as outdoor dining expansions and the temporary closure of Pearl Street between 9th and 11th streets. As we move forward in the recovery process, DBP and the impacted businesses thank City Council for their unanimous support of the 5-year pilot program to continue outdoor dining opportunities throughout the city.

While the outdoor dining pilot provides the opportunity for establishments to opt-in to participate, the temporary closure of the West End does not provide any opt-in options to the West End business community - who are essential for the district's continued success. Many of these businesses have expressed that should the temporary closure be extended past this summer, it will continue to be detrimental to their operations as they continue post-pandemic recovery efforts. Representing the best interests of our membership base, DBP would like the temporary closure to be lifted while the city looks to better understand the mitigating impacts of various scenarios over the course of the next several months. Altering the circulation of vehicular traffic, as well as parking impacts on West End accessibility without sufficient study could not only continue to negatively affect West End businesses, but potentially undermine the intentional design of the four block pedestrian mall and the surrounding commercial district. DBP's stance on this position comes after soliciting extensive input with impacted businesses on the West End, in addition to sales tax analysis comparing West End business recovery with city-wide levels, and consultation with urban design and walkability experts.

As emergency orders expire, the Downtown Boulder Partnership, in collaboration with the City of Boulder, is currently exploring public space enhancement opportunities in the downtown district as part of the development of a 5-year Downtown Vision Plan. Learning from pandemic responses, best practices, community input and existing studies, the visioning process is exploring potential long term options for the West End, including but not limited to a seasonal or flexible street closure. Other potential street repurposing opportunities throughout the downtown will also be considered as part of the visioning process, which will include broad community input. The Downtown Vision Plan will be shared publicly in the fall of 2022.

## **Walkability**

Downtown Boulder has enjoyed a legacy as one of the more pedestrian-friendly downtowns in the country, with the Pearl Street Mall as the centerpiece. This acclaim is no accident. Those assembled for the design and implementation of the Pearl Street Mall nearly a half a century ago conducted years of study and took into consideration a multitude of factors including the ideal length of the mall, the vehicular circulation and proximity of parking. The point is not that what was studied then is necessarily still fully relevant, but rather that the design was studied thoughtfully and extensively.

## **Economic Vitality**

Prior to the pandemic, the West End of Pearl Street, beginning at 11th Street and continuing to the west, was by many measures among the most successful few blocks, commercially and socially, in Boulder. The vibrancy experienced in this micro district was due to many factors including the adjacency and the contrast to the Pearl Street Mall. Since the closing of the street on West Pearl, Sales tax revenues have lagged, relative to other commercial areas within the city. In an interview with Urban Planner and author of the acclaimed book *Walkable City*, Jeff Speck asserted to DBP staff that the criteria for success of repurposing any street in the public right-of-way within a commercial district, needs to be measured by the revenue of the impacted businesses. As obvious as that assertion might be, it can not be overstated. Based on the data available to date, the West End street closure has not been a success. DBP is committed to supporting opportunities for repurposing streets that would enhance economic vitality.