



City of Costa Mesa

Agenda Report

77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA
92626

Item #: 25-532

Meeting Date: 11/04/2025

TITLE: HOUSING ELEMENT REZONING (NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE WE ALL BELONG) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

DEPARTMENT: ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT/PLANNING DIVISION

**PRESENTED BY: ANNA MCGILL, PLANNING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the City Council receive the presentation, provide feedback, and file this report.

BACKGROUND:

The City's adopted Housing Element is a State-mandated strategic blueprint for addressing Costa Mesa's existing and projected housing needs through 2029. The Housing Element describes housing characteristics, establishes housing programs, and identifies Housing Element Opportunity Sites to meet a housing target called the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA). Costa Mesa's current Regional RHNA allocation is 11,760 units. The City must complete zoning and land use regulations described in the Housing Element, allowing approximately 17,200 units, due to needing a buffer beyond the RHNA, to adequately plan for the RHNA capacity and achieve Housing Element certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

In November 2022, Costa Mesa voters approved Measure K, an ordinance to allow updates to land use plans that support housing in commercial and industrial corridors without a citywide vote. Costa Mesa's Housing Element Opportunity Sites, except for the Fairview Development Center (FDC) site owned by the State of California, are within the Measure K boundary. Costa Mesa Municipal Code 13-200.106(g), the ordinance implementing Measure K, requires city-sponsored land use plans on sites within the Measure K boundary, such as the Housing Element Opportunity Sites, to "include a public community visioning process (e.g., workshops, design charrettes, community surveys) prior to adoption or amendment by the City Council at any required public hearing."

In response to State-mandated housing regulations and in accordance with the City Council's goal to "diversify, stabilize and increase housing to reflect community needs," the City endeavors to implement the Housing Element. At its February 18, 2025, meeting, the City Council approved a Professional Services Agreement with Dudek for the Housing Element rezoning program, including a public community visioning process, and Environmental Impact Report. Since officially kicking off the

project in March 2025, the Consultant Team and City staff have been working diligently on several components, including public visioning and outreach. The following is a progress report specific to community visioning and outreach.

PROJECT PROGRESSION:

Public Outreach

Public outreach is an important component of the Housing Element implementation effort. The City is committed to conducting an inclusive, accessible, and transparent community engagement process that allows for meaningful public input. Feedback collected through various outreach methods will directly inform planning decisions and implementation strategies.

Given the number of concurrent public and private development efforts in the community, establishing a clear and recognizable project identity was an early priority. Staff recognized that terms such as “Housing Element implementation” or “Housing Element rezoning program” may not be easily understood by residents who are unfamiliar with community planning terminology. To promote broader public understanding and engagement, the Planning Division and City Manager’s Office (in coordination with Dudek) collaborated to develop the project name “Neighborhoods Where We All Belong.” This name was selected to reflect the City’s intent to facilitate housing and neighborhood development to meet diverse local needs. It avoids technical language in order to be more approachable to a wider audience.

The City developed a custom logo to help identify Neighborhoods Where We All Belong, incorporating a housing roofline into the existing City of Costa Mesa logo. This visual element reinforces that the effort is City-initiated and focused on housing.

Image 1. Project logo



As shown in Image 2 on the following page, the City is employing a variety of outreach methods to ensure broad and equitable participation. Engagement activities are scheduled at different times of day, days of the week, and in multiple locations and formats to accommodate diverse schedules and preferences. Planned activities include public workshops, walking tours, pop-up events at local businesses and community events, focused stakeholder discussions, and formal public hearings and study sessions.

Image 2. Community Visioning Process

The public outreach strategy for the Housing Element implementation is organized into three general phases.

Round 1 focused on community visioning for the future of housing and neighborhoods in Costa Mesa. Outreach activities were designed to help identify what residents would like to see in new residential and mixed-use developments and how new development can be thoughtfully integrated into existing built-out areas. Feedback from this phase, along with state requirements, will inform the preparation of draft development regulations.

Rounds 2 and 3 will focus on sharing and refining draft plans and proposals with the community. These later phases are intended to ensure the draft regulations reflect community input as well as comply with state law. Round 2 outreach will begin in late January 2026. The project schedule, including phases of outreach, is provided in Image 3.

Image 3. Project Timeline

Between June and October 2025, the City, along with consultants from Dudek and subconsultant, Kearns & West, planned and executed several types of public outreach and visioning activities. The community visioning and outreach plan for Neighborhoods Where We All Belong was strategically designed to maximize opportunities for public participation. In addition to a variety of events and activities in English and Spanish, the community is also able to provide input throughout the process via email, an online comment form, and the project website.

Round 1 outreach was completed on October 11, 2025. Input from the Open House, workshops, surveys, and pop-ups is being evaluated to identify priorities, opportunities, areas of concern, and ideas to help further the City's goal of improving and increasing housing options for all Costa Mesans. A summary document of the outreach information and findings will be available to the City Council at the end of November and posted to the project website and emailed to the interest list.

Website

A project website, <https://www.CostaMesaNeighborhoods.com>, was established to provide online access to project information and news, outreach events, and online participation tools such as an online comment card and survey. The website is available in English and Spanish and is frequently updated as the project evolves. An example from the website is provided in Image 4 on the following page. By September 27, 2025, the project website had approximately 2,700 unique views.

The website hosted an online survey asking about priorities for good neighborhoods, priorities for designing multi-story housing, and a vision statement for future housing and new neighborhoods. The online survey received over 240 responses in two weeks. Additionally, dozens of members of the community took a written version of the survey at various pop-up events.

Image 4. Project Website



Open House and Workshops

The City officially kicked off public engagement for the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong effort at a community Open House at the Norma Hertzog Community Center on July 30, 2025. The Open House was the first in a series of public visioning and engagement events in the first “round” of outreach actions. Community members participated in a variety of interactive and informative activities.

Attendees watched a welcome video (available in on the City's YouTube channel in English via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-rT-7xxL2U> and Spanish via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18iCDXFXQZkm>), reflected on the types of housing attendees lived in, reviewed educational boards—including maps of Housing Element and Measure K sites—enjoyed a photo booth, a prioritization exercise, and added ideas to a visioning board for future housing and neighborhoods.

The Open House was followed by three additional workshops, each designed to build on the information and ideas shared at the kickoff event while providing area-specific engagement opportunities. Based on participants that signed in, over 205 unique community members participated in the Open House and workshops. The Open House and workshops were conducted in both English and Spanish. Between

these four events, the City collected input in the form of 135 special locations on maps, over 400 priority dots related to neighborhood design, and 354 visioning comments on sticky notes.

Harbor Boulevard & Newport Boulevard Workshop

The Harbor Boulevard and Newport Boulevard Workshop took place on August 21, 2025 at City Hall. In addition to the prioritizing activity and written vision board, participants engaged with large maps of both corridors, placing pins and flags on areas they frequent. Participants identified uses or areas they regarded as special or of significance, spurring discussions on how housing could be integrated along these corridors and other Housing Element and Measure K areas nearby.

Westside Walking Tour & Workshop

The Westside Walking Tour & Workshop was held on August 23, 2025, at the Costa Mesa Senior Center. The event combined a workshop with a 1-mile walking tour, highlighting areas of infill development along West 19th Street and Placentia Avenue. Participants had the opportunity to observe long-established development and examples of more recent residential, live-work, and mixed-use projects. Discussions centered on how to better integrate future housing, address concerns about development pressures and mobility, and create housing opportunities that will appeal to Westside residents. A preview of the walking tour prepared by CMTV is available online (<https://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com/round1-harbornewport-1>).

North Costa Mesa & SoBECA Workshop

The North Costa Mesa & SoBECA (South Bristol Entertainment Cultural Arts) Workshop was held on September 10, 2025, at FLDWRK, a local coworking and event space. With several Housing Element Opportunity Sites identified in the North Mesa area for potential housing at 90 units per acre, participants explored topics such as building massing, height, ground floor design, and the balance of public vs. private open space. A recent 80-unit-per-acre project in North Mesa was used as a real-world example to inspire conversation about design preferences and neighborhood compatibility.

Pop-Ups

In addition to structured workshops, staff conducted Neighborhoods Where We All Belong pop-up events, which are informal and temporary activities designed to engage the community on the project and solicit public participation in a convenient setting. Locations are strategically chosen to reach residents in their daily routines, such as coffee shops and local events. As of October 11, 2025, twelve pop-up events were completed:

- Three citywide/community events (Concert in the Park, ARTventure, and the Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration);
- Five coffee shop pop-ups (602 Coffee & Acai, Coffee Nature, MoonGoat Coffee, MoonGoat Greenhouse, and Neat Coffee);
- One brewery pop-up (Salty Bear Brewing Co.); and
- Three local organization events (Costa Mesa Chamber of Commerce Rise and Shine, Fair Housing Foundation Costa Mesa Workshop, and Back to Save Our Youth Night).

Pop-ups at coffee shops initially included a brief 2-question questionnaire. After three pop-ups, staff recognized that many community members were open to responding to more substantial questions, so long as the activity remained brief. In response, a 4-question survey was developed for the pop-ups and for online engagement. Over 90 community members were engaged through the in-person pop-ups at coffee shops and a brewery. Dozens of additional community members were engaged through the other pop-up events.

Additionally, in August, staff discussed the project with parents at a bike training at Estancia High School and handed out event flyers during Back to School Night at Adams Elementary and Paularino Elementary, and a Love Costa Mesa event. Additional pop-ups will take place in early 2026, when draft design standards are available for review.

Focused Discussion Groups

To gather more comprehensive insights into local housing and neighborhood development issues, the City convened a series of focused discussion groups with representatives from local non-profit organizations, the faith-based community, higher education, local interest groups, and the development community. The groups were intentionally small scale, with 5 to 8 participants each, to ensure every individual had ample opportunity to contribute. These discussions are centered on their vision for housing in Costa Mesa, including how the City can best encourage and facilitate new housing and thriving neighborhoods. As of this report, three focused discussions have been held. The first meeting concentrated on the property owner/development community generally in North Costa Mesa and SoBECA areas, the second included organizations and builders active in the Westside area, and the third included a broader group of local organizations, higher education, non-profit and for-profit developers, and a community action group.

Raising Public Awareness

The City employed a range of outreach strategies to raise awareness about the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong effort and encourage community participation. In July 2025, the City issued a press release announcing the launch of the public outreach events and website. The release was distributed to over 10,000 email addresses and posted to both the City of Costa Mesa website and the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong project website. That same month, a postcard was mailed to more than 50,000 addresses in Costa Mesa. The postcard included information about the Open House and three workshops in English and Spanish, and a QR code linking to the project website.

Between July 18 and September 26, 2025, the project was promoted through nine issues of the City Hall Snapshot (the City Manager's Office weekly digital newsletter), which reaches approximately 12,000 subscribers. In addition, emails were periodically sent to subscribers of the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong interest list, which has grown to approximately 300 recipients.

To further increase awareness, the City leveraged social media platforms—sharing stories, posts, and reels across its official accounts. From late July through late September, these posts generated a combined reach of more than 228,600 viewers.

Additional advertising methods included:

- Maintaining and updating the project website
- Sharing the project welcome videos on the City's YouTube channel
- Posting and distributing flyers at community facilities
- Placing event signage outside Open House and workshop locations ahead of the event
- Emailing local non-profit organizations and faith-based communities
- Distributing flyers at events such as e-bike training sessions and back-to-school nights

This multifaceted approach has helped increase visibility of the initiative and encourage meaningful participation across Costa Mesa's diverse community.

NEXT STEPS:

The data collected at the Open House, workshops, pop-ups, focused discussions, and surveys is being analyzed to identify key findings to inform the upcoming draft regulations. Dudek is preparing a memorandum summarizing the data, key findings, and how the work may influence land use and design regulations to be posted on the website in progress. Early analysis of the input provided during the first round of outreach identified the following key themes of what Costa Mesans want in the future of housing and neighborhoods:

- Affordable housing options and a variety of development types;
- Multi-modal transportation options with improved walkability and safer streets;
- Open spaces and landscaped pathways within residential developments connecting to other uses;
- Public and private spaces for community gathering and culture;
- Eclectic character so Costa Mesa continues to feel unique from other cities; and
- Transparency to ensure the public has more technical information.

The planning for Round 2 of public outreach has already begun. Round 2 will give the public a chance to review and provide feedback on draft regulations. Given that there will be a tangible draft to react to, staff see this round of outreach as a good opportunity to seek input from local youth on housing for their future. Staff is exploring options for a hands-on outreach/career training with local youth. Based on feedback received at workshops and pop-ups, Round 2 will include an online survey that is available for several weeks and an online workshop in addition to in-person workshops, pop-ups, and focused discussions.

Outside of public outreach, the next major work efforts for Neighborhoods Where We All Belong in 2025 include, but are not limited to:

- Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, preparing an Initial Study and Notice of Preparation for an Environmental Impact Report;
- Drafting Zoning Code amendments to comply with state law; and
- Drafting residential and mixed-use development zoning and objective design standards.

GENERAL PLAN CONFORMANCE:

The public outreach conducted is a component of implementing the Housing Element, an adopted chapter of the City's General Plan.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

There is no public notice requirement for the City Council Neighborhoods Where We All Belong public engagement update. However, the City provided the following informal notice:

- The date and time of the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong public engagement update was posted on the project website.
- Information about the update was emailed to the effort's interest list.

FISCAL REVIEW:

There is no fiscal impact with this action. Within the City's Housing Element Rezoning Program are statutory requirements and specific timelines. Funding for the next steps of the Housing Element Rezoning Program is available in the Housing Authority Fund (Fund 222). The project has a budget of \$2.4 million, of which \$2.26 million remains in the project balance at the time of the City Council hearing date.

CONCLUSION:

The City successfully engaged a broad audience in the first round of Neighborhoods Where We All Belong through a multitude of public outreach activities. Public engagement leads to better-informed decisions and empowers residents and other stakeholders to shape their communities. By meaningfully incorporating public input, the City will create regulations that reflect community needs, comply with state law, and lead to more positive outcomes. The City is preparing to utilize feedback from the community to inform the next steps of the project. In early 2026, the community will be invited to reconnect with this effort, review draft regulations, and continue this important work toward a future with more housing options for all Costa Mesans.