



INFORMATION ITEM MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

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Date: December 15, 2020

Subject: Information Item: Update on COVID-19 Pandemic Business Impacts and Boulder Economic Trends

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic, first detected in Colorado in March of 2020, continues to impact Boulder and surrounding community residents, workers and businesses presenting a myriad of safety, health, and economic challenges for the Boulder County metro area. Boulder has frequently been recognized for its vibrant arts and culture offerings, healthy quality of life, sustainability-focused policies and start-up friendly business environment, and has long benefited from a highly diversified local economy. The city's vibrant, diverse economy has provided local employment opportunities and helped generate sales tax revenues that fund many important community services. The global COVID-19 health emergency has presented unique economic challenges in both the depth and reach of continuing impacts monitored by city staff and our local governmental partners and regularly reported to council.

This memo presents council with:

- a summary of results from the recent [Boulder COVID-19 Business Impact Follow Up Survey \(October 2020\)](#),
- additional context concerning local economic trends, and
- identified priority Economic Response and Recovery areas for additional consideration.

It reflects analyses conducted by staff and Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance Partners, including the Leeds School of Business of the University of Colorado - Boulder, Boulder Chamber, Boulder Economic Council, and Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau.

FISCAL IMPACT

Analyses in this item were completed by staff and Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance (BBRRA) partner organizations and had no additional budget impact. Subject to council support, implementation of the strategies arising out of this item would be included in the 2022 city budget proposal and/or may seek funding via federal, state or local stimulus program(s) currently under consideration by applicable legislative bodies. Decisions concerning prioritization and use of such funding, if and as available, would be balanced against other uses responsive to the needs of the community for mitigating pandemic impacts.

COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND IMPACTS

Economic: Proposals reported, explored or otherwise arising out of this item seek to implement those goals and objectives outlined in the Boulder Comprehensive Plan, as amended (Section 5 – Economy) and may otherwise support other objectives of the community.

ANALYSIS

I. COVID-19 Business Impact Survey Update – Continuing Impacts on Boulder Businesses

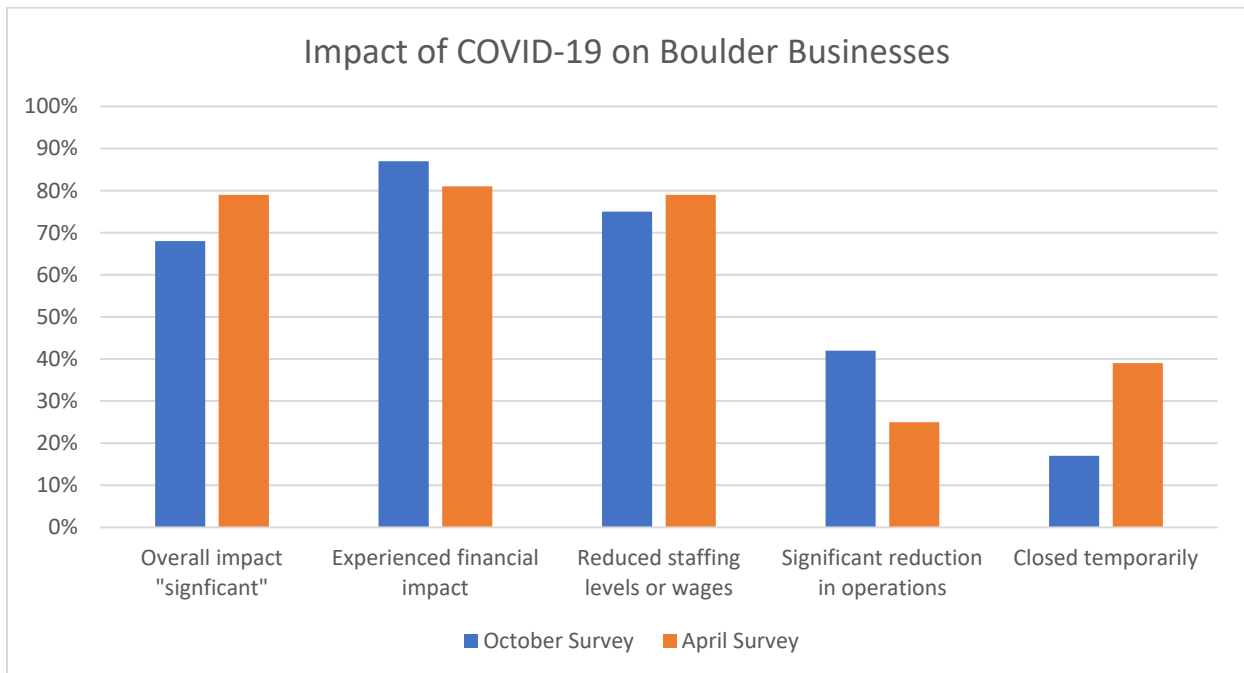
a. Survey Results

Following a more qualitative inquiry in February 2020 conducted by the Boulder Chamber, city staff conducted a COVID-19 Business Impact Survey in April 2020 exploring the pandemic's impacts on local businesses. Nearly 1,200 businesses responded to that survey with results reported during the April 28, 2020 regular council meeting during the COVID-19 briefing. Now, six months following that inquiry, staff provides a summary of a similar survey conducted from Oct. 1 through Oct. 9, 2020 (more than two weeks prior to announcement of the State of Colorado revised COVID-19 dial and the move of Boulder County from Orange to Red on that dial).

In October, 542 individuals, representing a broad range of Boulder businesses, responded to the survey update. While findings largely reinforce prior learning and reflect the severe impact of the pandemic on many businesses, there are indications that the ability of businesses to adapt as supported by available assistance from federal, state, and local sources may have provided some relief. Key findings include:

- **94% of respondents reported the pandemic has had an impact on their business including 68% that described the impact as “significant”** (down from 79% in April). One-fourth of businesses reported the impact decreased under Safer-at-Home public health guidelines.

- Consistent with previous findings, **over 80% of businesses indicated they had experienced a negative financial impact, mostly due to decreased sales.** While more businesses reported an increase in operating expenses, fewer reported difficulty paying employees or business rent.
- **75% of the businesses with two or more employees reported having made changes to staffing levels or wages since the onset of the pandemic.** One half reported a decrease in the number of employees at their Boulder locations due to COVID-19.
- **The most negative impacts were reported by businesses in industries less conducive to remote work or that require direct customer contact** including hospitality (restaurants, bars, hotels), personal services (hair care, childcare, fitness, etc.), arts, entertainment, recreation, non-grocery retail, and healthcare.
- **Nearly 70% of businesses reported a significant reduction in operations** including 17% that closed temporarily due to COVID-19. While only 2% of the businesses surveyed in October indicated they had permanently closed their business, the actual figure is likely to be higher.



- **Minority-owned businesses and nonprofit organizations were generally more likely to report negative impacts** of the pandemic than other businesses.
- **More than 90% of businesses reported changes to their operations in response to the pandemic.**
 - The most common changes related to health and safety including requiring social distancing, adding new cleaning protocols and health screening procedures, and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees.
 - Fewer businesses closed their facilities to the public in October (26%) than April (46%) while a similar number (22%) had more of their employees working from home.

- A higher number of businesses reported starting or increasing online sales, increasing marketing or promotional activity, and starting or increasing deliveries in October.
- While many of the changes were expected to be temporary, some businesses indicated they expect to continue new cleaning protocols, virtual meetings, health screenings, and increased online sales and telecommuting after the pandemic.
- **More than three-fourths of businesses (77%) had used some form of assistance to help address the impacts of COVID-19.**
 - 68% benefited from financial assistance including grants, loans, or other credit.
 - 39% utilized information resources provided by the City of Boulder, Boulder Chamber, Boulder County Public Health, Boulder Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Downtown Boulder Partnership, or other organizations.
 - 30% accessed technical assistance including business advice and consulting, legal counsel or insurance advice, or assistance with improving online presence or marketing.
- **More than two-thirds (68%) of businesses indicated they currently need or anticipate needing assistance to help address impacts of the pandemic.** This figure was 85% in April, reflecting the assistance businesses had already received and the effect of continued economic disruption.

Staff also used the October survey update as an opportunity to gauge the access and use of federal assistance programs and perceptions about city policies and responsiveness to the pandemic.

- Many of the businesses surveyed reported they received assistance through federal stimulus programs including **72% that received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan and 29% that had received an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)** . Only 8% indicated they had applied for and did not receive either PPP or EIDL funding.
- Utilizing local Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funds allocation, the city's economy-related initiatives in response to the pandemic have included, but not been limited to:
 - Providing resources for impacted workers;
 - Developing a Boulder Business Response Program to support temporary outdoor expansions and designated curbside pick up locations for restaurants and retailers;
 - Providing grants to help local, small businesses and nonprofits address COVID-19 impacts;
 - Launching a Restaurant S.O.S. program to help reduce the cost of delivery services for local restaurants; and
 - Encouraging local shopping through the Retail S.O.S. program that offered matching bonus gift cards to individuals who purchased gift cards which can be used at participating merchants in Boulder.

In addition, the City of Boulder and other BBRRRA partners provided information resources in English and Spanish to help businesses sustain operations and follow public health guidelines, including online updates, webinars, and links to financial and other resources, and to help impacted workers access unemployment insurance, retraining opportunities, and reemployment resources.

Programs offered by the city and alliance partners have been well received.

- 70% of businesses rated Boulder’s overall reaction and policies to COVID-19 and the re-opening process as favorable.
- 85% gave the permitting process for the city’s Temporary Outdoor Expansion Program positive ratings.
- Boulder Small Business Grant recipients expressed gratitude for the financial assistance provided through the program.
- Many local businesses signed up for the Restaurant S.O.S. or Retail S.O.S. program. Residents responded by ordering meals from local restaurants and purchasing Boulder Gift Cards.

Despite these efforts, it is likely the need for assistance will continue as the pandemic persists. Only 31% of businesses reported they have been able to continue operations with minimal disruption, 42% expect at least some of the changes made to staffing levels to be permanent, and two-thirds indicated they need or anticipate needing financial and other assistance to address the pandemic’s impact.

b. Additional Business Feedback

Concurrently, the city’s economic vitality partners (the Boulder Chamber, Boulder Economic Council, and The Latino Chamber of Boulder County) have conducted virtual sessions in partnership with Boulder County Public Health to provide industry-specific information and seek feedback from businesses. Nearly 160 public health sessions have been conducted since April, including industry-specific sessions for 11 industries and general cross-industry sessions in both English and Spanish. Sessions continue to provide businesses with up-to-date information on public health orders and safety guidance and opportunities to network and share industry-specific best practices with peers. In addition, the partners have conducted over 40 feedback sessions, facilitated by the Boulder Chamber with more than 500 participants representing nearly 30 industries, to garner qualitative feedback on the lingering pandemic’s impacts, resource needs, and the effectiveness of public and private-sector response. Over 65% of public health and feedback session attendees were from businesses located in Boulder’s city limits. This feedback, shared among the Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance organizations, noted:

- ***Certain industries are faring better than others, but business disruptions exist across the board.*** Experienced business disruptions range from an inability to secure goods in their respective supply chains, workforce absenteeism due to issues as varied as COVID-

19 exposure and childcare needs, concerns with job site safety, concerns regarding costs for rental or leased space, and other issues.

- ***Businesses desire greater health and emergency order clarity, cross-agency coordination and considerations concerning notice of changing guidance.*** While there remains a high level of commitment to compliance and safety among businesses in Boulder, many noted a need for greater coordination between the state, county and local government in considering and communicating changes to local orders or otherwise impacting workplace operations.
 - **Defining essential and nonessential businesses** – There remains frustration regarding the designation of businesses as ‘essential’ and how such designations impact an ability to continue operations, as well as the difficulty of delineating ‘essential’ and ‘non-essential’ activities within businesses.
 - **Frequency and timing of notices related to closures and business operations impacts** – Businesses found dedicated webpages helpful yet, perhaps, too plentiful. The importance of partners (such as Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance partner organizations) in providing succinct, frequent updates in industry-relevant language was highly valued. Both government and partner organizations gained high marks for effective collaboration in communications, but greater notice would be appreciated.
 - **Appreciation for resources and need for initiatives supporting continued business operations** - There were many expressions of appreciation for the quick response offered by the city and alliance partner organizations in addressing the needs for safety guidance, grants, information on available resources and industry-specific initiatives. As an example, many businesses praised the city’s quick response and coordination to enable temporary outdoor dining expansions and to-go liquor sales accommodations for restaurants. This came with requests for greater consideration of returning businesses (across industries) seeking speedy and cost-sensitive modifications of office space, repurposed retail formats and other efforts as a vaccine might be introduced and businesses of all types reevaluate their future operations.
 - **Understanding of which decisions are made at the state versus local level** – There remains some confusion regarding public health emergency-related decision making. This led many businesses to be uncertain as to where they should direct questions. This is viewed as a process improvement area in the future, along with an opportunity to clarify jurisdictional oversight and enforcement of pandemic-related actions.
- ***Businesses and commercial property owners consider commercial space modification ease a critical factor in recovery.*** The impact of the pandemic on property values remains unclear, though there remains some concern of a market disruption in the face of uncertainty regarding when and how businesses, workers and visitors will return in a post-COVID environment. Businesses suggest the expense and ease of reconfiguring commercial and industrial spaces, such as retail, manufacturing/distribution, and office,

can be a barrier to the economic recovery effort. This is likely to lead to a call for flexibility or process improvements in the review of commercial space adjustments to help avoid vacancy and to allow the Boulder market to remain competitive.

- ***Businesses recognize the importance of the University of Colorado's presence and vibrance to substantially impact long term economic recovery.*** The presence and buying power of the university's students and faculty have a substantial impact on the community's local businesses. According to many businesses, in addition to virtual learning and the shortened on-campus semester, the university's inability to host events, conferences and performances contributed to the significant economic disruption. Businesses are mindful of the university's decisions regarding in-person learning and returning staff to campus in 2021 and look forward to learning more about any specific plans.
- ***Restaurant, retail, hotel, and arts & culture organizations continue to trail other industries in economic recovery.*** Prolonged disruption is a point of additional concern given the impacts on tourism-related revenues and sales tax revenues generated by these industries which contribute to the city's general fund.

II. Economic Context and Trends

As previously shared with council, the City of Boulder and its residents and businesses benefit from four significant drivers contributing the stability of the local economy:

- University of Colorado - Boulder
- Federally funded research labs
- Businesses in diverse industries
- Tourism

The presence and interests of these drivers weave together, influencing the performance and success of the others and of the local economy. For example, the university's reputation and presence contributes to many industries, availability of local quality talent for employers, meetings and events that generate visitors and tourism that generate sales taxes, as well as community diversity and generational mix. The presence of primary employers and tourists create a customer base that generates local sales tax revenues and keeps the community competitive in terms of job availability and sustainable city services which, in turn, appeal to university prospects and primary employers. In essence, the continuing viability and success of each economic anchor substantially influences the others, each of which have experienced some degree of disruption created by COVID-19.

Each of these anchors appreciate, and to a certain extent, depend upon the recovery strategies and initiatives of the others.

- **University of Colorado - Boulder** is the city's largest employer and contributes an estimated \$380 million to the state economy each year. In 2019, the university had nearly 10,000 non-student employees and over 35,000 students. The CU Boulder campus is the largest of the systems' four campuses and has a substantial international student component and athletic department presence affecting the campus budget and activities on both a short and long-term basis.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on activity levels, revenue, and expenses for the university. Over the past year, applications decreased by 12%, fall student enrollment decreased 2%, and international student presence decreased by 25%. The university continues to be affected by state funding limitations which will be impacted by the pandemic. Necessary safe operating decisions (in-class learning limits, athletic, performance, and other cancellations or shifts to virtual formats for graduation, parent's weekend, alumni activities and other events) have substantially reduced the level of activity and spending generated by the university. It is currently unclear when the campus will be fully open to students, faculty, staff, and visitors. The university is likely to continue to be cautious and thoughtful, basing decisions on public health conditions and guidelines.

- **Federal-funded research labs** in Boulder employ nearly 4,000 people and contribute an estimated \$1 billion annually to the local economy through wages, construction projects, visitor spending and other activity. In addition to advancing scientific research and the development of new technologies in a variety of disciplines, the labs support K-12 education, workforce development, and businesses.

COVID-19 has substantially impacted the national dialog and, according to a recent study conducted by CO-LABS¹, many federal labs are bracing for budget reductions in fiscal year 2021 (which started on Oct. 1, 2020) as funding is expected to be cut for research institutions not focused on pandemic-related response. Like many other organizations, the labs have made changes to assure health and safety which have increased expenses and created concerns about productivity in a remote work environment. The impacts on other federal budgets and programs is currently unknown. The city and its partners will continue to monitor planned federal research, science, and technology spending which may impact lab budgets and plans in the coming years.

- **Tourism** supports a significant number of employment opportunities and generates substantial tax revenue. In 2019, there were more than 400 accommodation and food services businesses with more than 9,500 tourism and hospitality industry workers employed in the city. Last year, visitors generated more than \$10 million in accommodations and short-term rental taxes and contributed to the \$23 million in taxes generated by restaurants across the city as well as retailers in downtown Boulder and the Twenty Ninth Street Shopping District.

Hospitality has been one of the hardest hit industries through the pandemic. Through September 2020, hotel occupancy is down 42%, accommodations tax decreased 60%, short-term rental taxes declined by 61%, and food service tax is down 37% from 2019

levels, reflecting travel restrictions, decreased university activity, fewer clients traveling to meet with Boulder businesses, and concerns about shopping and dining during a public health emergency. Many businesses in the industry have furloughed or laid off workers, many in lower wage jobs. The Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau has responded to the pandemic by promoting safe visitation and focusing promotional efforts on visitors that live in the area or within driving distance. Recent analysis by Smith Travel Research indicates that hotel occupancy in the state is improving and remains slightly better than national levels. However, industry experts do not expect a full recovery in hotel occupancy rates before 2023.

- **Boulder businesses** include primary employers (*businesses of any size that generate a substantial portion of their revenue from sales outside the area, thus bringing new money into the local economy*) and businesses in industries that primarily serve the local community. In 2019, there were approximately 7,100 employers in Boulder that provided full- or part-time jobs for nearly 99,000 individuals and paid wages totaling over \$8 billion. In addition to an employment base that includes a diverse mix of industries (including an estimated 750 primary employers), the local economy benefits from a high rate of startup activity (averaging more than 650 new businesses each year) and high concentrations of employment in advanced industries such as aerospace, bioscience, renewable energy, IT-software, and broadband and digital communications.

While all businesses have been impacted by the pandemic, several industries have been affected more severely than others. Restaurants, hotels, retailers, and arts, entertainment, and recreation businesses have been significantly impacted by necessary public health restrictions and steep declines in visitor, worker, and student activity.

Analysis concerning the health and vibrancy of the local economy will continue to focus on the plans, initiatives and resiliency of the city's economic anchors and the impact their decisions might have on the local economy such as:

- Access to local employment opportunities and employment levels
- Competitiveness in providing access to a locally qualified workforce
- Degree of economic equity opportunity and poverty level
- Sales tax generation and availability of community services provided by the city

Community Vitality and Finance department staff will continue to monitor and report economic indicators and other metrics to provide context for the community and input for council's policy-related considerations.

a. Economic update from CU Business Research Division

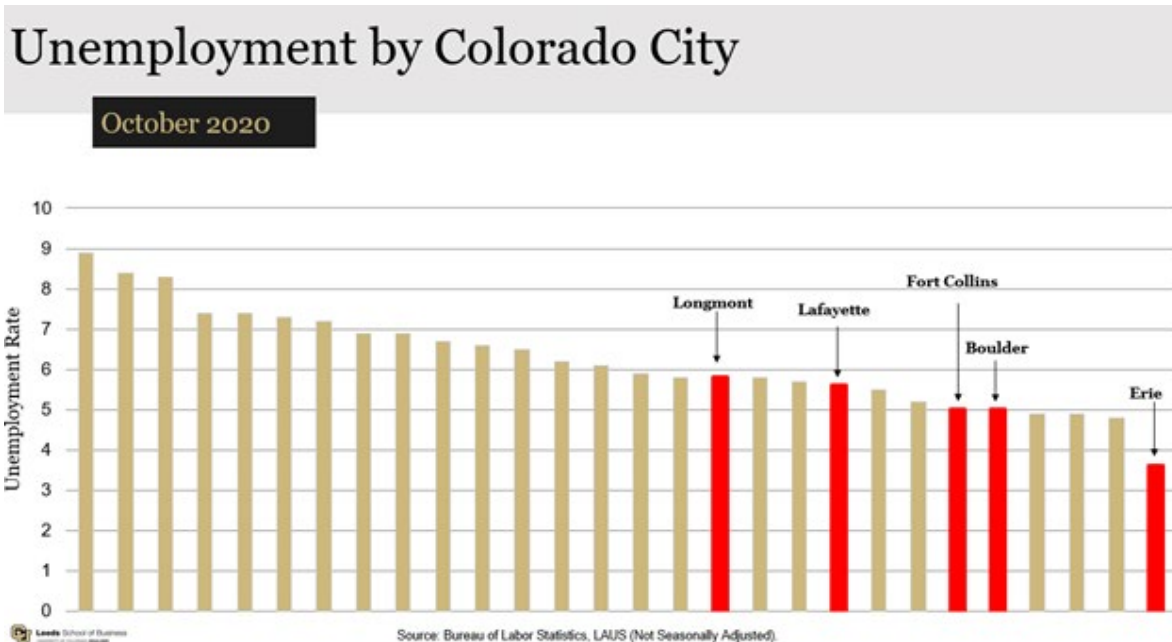
Following the Oct. 6, 2020 City Council meeting which included COVID-related economic updates from the city's Finance Department and CU Boulder's Leeds School of Business, staff solicited additional input from Dr. Richard Wobbekind, senior economist and associate dean for business and government relations, and Brian Lewandowski, executive director, business research division, regarding key indicators. A summary of the information and insight they provided is below.

Boulder’s economy is performing somewhat differently than that of Boulder County and Colorado. Boulder is faced with several unique challenges and opportunities and, according to Dr. Wobbekind, “some pandemic-induced trends may prove ‘sticky’ or longer lasting.” Factors that set the city apart from Boulder County and Colorado communities and have contributed to local economic vitality, such as the presence of the university, strong tourism industry, and number of nonresident workers, have created additional downside risk during the pandemic. Examples include:

- Fewer university students attending classes in person and fewer events and activities has reduced spending on restaurant meals, retail purchases, entertainment, and recreation;
- Fewer events, group meetings, and business and leisure visitors resulting in a decrease in hotel stays and spending; and
- Fewer nonresident workers commuting to work reducing spending for meals and other purchases typically made in Boulder.
- During the pandemic, main street retailers have not fared as well as big box retailers, such as Costco and Walmart, which have experienced increased sales. While this has been a mitigating factor for many communities, Boulder has more main street retailers and fewer big box retailers than many other cities its size.

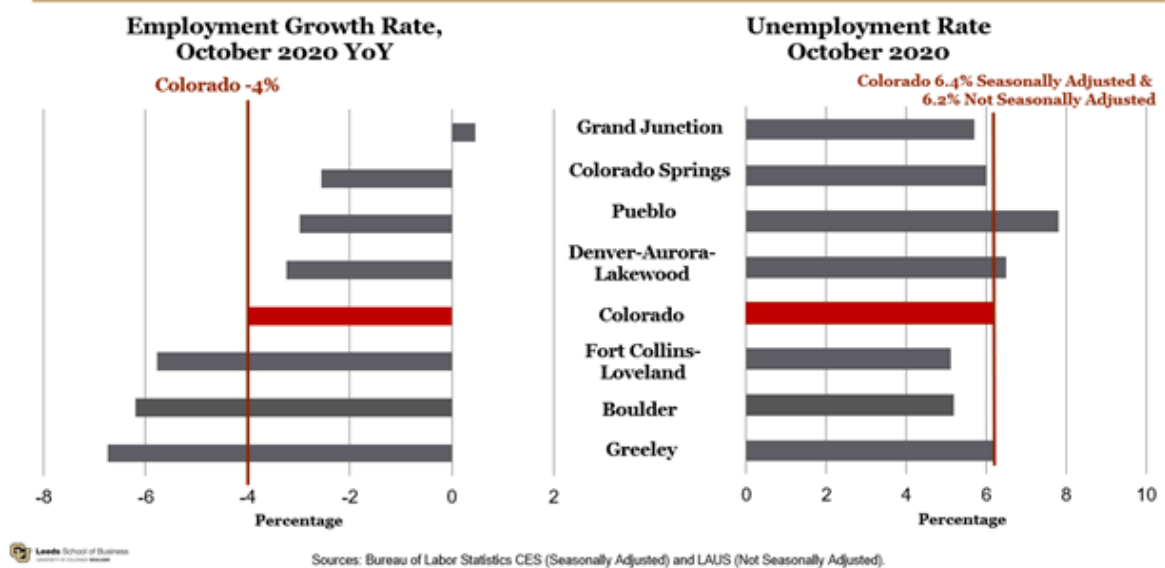
It will be important to consider these characteristics in monitoring and responding to COVID-19 impacts. Specific indicators and economic trends to watch include:

- ***The local unemployment rate should be monitored and compared to total job losses.*** While unemployment in the city of Boulder is lower than most other cities in the state, total employment in the Boulder metro area has not been growing at the same rate as other metro areas in the state.



According to Mr. Lewandowski, the city of Boulder’s unemployment rate (5% in October 2020, not seasonally adjusted) remains below state (6.2%) and federal (6.6%) levels. He also noted the rate of unemployment compares the number of persons seeking jobs to the number of positions held in that community. There are several dynamics in this ratio. First, a population declining concurrently with reduced employment may inadvertently disguise local job loss rates. Boulder’s unemployment rate reflects a declining population and a concurrent decline in full-time positions held.

Colorado MSAs—Employment Loss and Unemployment



He also said the city also may face more unemployment risk in the future if the pandemic drags on because of its high concentration of government jobs attached to CU-Boulder (including student workers), along with manufacturing, food service and the arts – all are sectors at risk for slow employment recovery.

Boulder should, therefore, continue monitoring the number, type, and income-level of jobs available in the community to retain adequate, quality job opportunities for all residents. Lower paying jobs have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and the consequences to working-class families poses increased risks to local poverty levels and perpetuating economic disparities.

- ***The rapid rise of telecommuting signals a change in work norms which may have substantial impacts locally (potentially positive or negative).***

Workplace norms have changed during the pandemic with a vast number of businesses embracing remote working, alternative work arrangements and other efforts aimed ensuring operations that are socially distanced and can accommodate the needs of workers.

- In April, the Brookings Institution¹ reported that up to half of U.S. workers were working from home, more than double the number that did paid work from home at least occasionally (20%) in 2017-18. While telecommuting had been slowly

growing over the years, Brookings indicated the pandemic was accelerating the trend and there may be a permanent shift toward more people working from home.

- In August, Harvard Business School published results of a study that suggests “at least 16 percent of American workers will switch from professional offices to working at home at least two days per week as a result of COVID-19.” Researchers expect a “dramatic and persistent shift in workplace norms around remote work” with implications for employers, workers, and policymakers. The study also found “remote work is much more common in industries with better educated and better paid workers” and that over one-third of companies that had more employees working remotely expect the practice to be more common after the pandemic.
- Those figures may be higher in Boulder. U.S. Census data indicates 16% of Boulder residents in the workforce regularly worked from home in 2019. The city’s survey of businesses in October found that 46% of employers in professional and technical services, information, finance, insurance, real estate, or advanced technology industries had increased the number of employees working from home and 41% expected to continue that change after the pandemic. These industries employ about 30% of the individuals who work in Boulder.

In many ways Boulder’s technology sectors, highly educated community and start-up friendly environment favor these shifts and many businesses have adapted well. Nationally and locally, workplaces have grown more appreciative of the impact that remote learning, in-person school schedules, and affordable childcare have had on workers across all industries. For those unable or unwilling to return to a traditional office or worksite environment, the lingering pandemic has presented new questions (i.e. whether they might find other, more flexible work arrangements elsewhere; whether they might be able to work anywhere and continue to enjoy some of the flexibility and cost savings associated with in-home work). For employers, response to the COVID pandemic has resulted in analysis of the impact of telecommuting on productivity, workforce retention strategies, technology-enabled work, and the evaluation of uses and needs in workspaces, including shared work environments.

In addition, while employers seek to remain competitive in their employment-related practices and the future of alternative work arrangements is uncertain, it should be noted that Boulder’s in-commuting population substantially contributes to the viability of small businesses in the community, particularly eateries, retail shops, and personal services. Reinforcing this point, in a recent survey commissioned by the Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau, 69% of restaurants and 46% of retailers said their businesses would fail without tourism. Sixty percent of merchants said tourism plays a greater role in their business today than five years ago.

- ***Shift to e-commerce and other deployed strategies to operate in a post-COVID environment will be a consideration of businesses across industries and may result in a need to reevaluate the use of workspace and technology***

The pandemic has accelerated the number of businesses seeking new business models to improve efficiencies and ensure continued operation in the near-term. While experiences differ by industry and it is unclear how long these changes will persist beyond recovery, communities should anticipate increased need for internet access (by residents, workers, and businesses) and enabling the expansion of e-commerce. Those needs range from enabling internet access for newly remote-based workers to enabling more fulfillment centers or operations conducted during nontraditional hours. Municipal responsiveness to these shifts (Wi-Fi hotspot distribution, land use, zoning, permitting, incentives, and the cost and ease of review) are likely to impact community competitiveness and present an opportunity to influence the retention of primary employers and growth-stage businesses in the community. With increased remote working and ongoing remote learning, identifying solutions for areas with inadequate infrastructure will be an ongoing priority.

- ***Virtual learning and access to childcare will substantially affect short-term (and potentially long term) availability of local workers***

Through the pandemic, working parents of school-aged children have faced the challenge of facilitating their children's remote learning while productively working from home. In an April article, *The World Economic Forum*³ estimated 1.2 billion children in 186 countries were impacted by school closures due to COVID-19. The market for education technology including language apps, virtual tutoring, online learning software, and video conferencing tools was growing before the pandemic, and there has been an acceleration in the demand for and use of these technologies. The Boulder Valley School District has developed the [Back Together BVSD Reintroduction Plan](#) with five phases designed to provide flexibility in responding to the public health emergency. Phases range from all students learning remotely from home to in-person learning with no health and safety restrictions. It will be important to ensure that students have access to the technology they need throughout these phases. Vulnerable families are particularly at risk for having children fall behind.

- ***Boulder faces an increasingly competitive market (including neighboring community competitiveness) and the 'second floor' is in a high state of evolution and should be monitored as both a challenge and opportunity.***

Boulder has long benefitted from the presence of start-ups that begin in Boulder, grow in the community and, in many instances, are acquired, merge or relocate when their space or organizational needs cannot be accommodated in the city. Over the past several years, more commercial and industrial space has been built in nearby cities, providing attractive alternative locations for growing Boulder companies.

Businesses are likely to reevaluate their need for space based on changes made to operations due to COVID-19. Opinions differ on how the demand for office, industrial, and retail space may change after the pandemic. Community Vitality staff will continue to monitor commercial vacancy rates and other real estate trends to help identify arising challenges and potential opportunities.

III. Development of Boulder's COVID Economic Recovery Strategy

Staff has continued to evolve the city's responses as the pandemic impacts the community. While many of the cross-departmental initiatives have been well received in addressing the immediate needs of residents, workers and businesses, staff and alliance partner organizations are focusing greater attention to addressing the longer-term economic recovery. Based on the feedback, research and analysis summarized above, staff recommends:

- Continued provision of information and resources to aid in continued local economic recovery
- Testing- and vaccine-related information as coordinated with the State of Colorado, Boulder County, and Boulder Business Response and Recovery Partners
- Support and direction concerning safe visitation and operations
- Ongoing consultation with the University of Colorado, BVSD and local childcare providers to support stabilized return-to-school and/or childcare access.

Greater focus will be devoted to:

- Monitoring the rapid rise of e-commerce, logistics and fulfillment businesses across the country
- Local business diversification, middle income job retention and efforts to enable growth of local companies (re-recruiting companies)
- Workforce development investment toward retention of a locally quality workforce and to address income and opportunity disparities
- Access to goods and services that are affordable to individuals and households with lower incomes, as well as goods and services that meet the needs of all community members
- Partnerships to bridge the digital divide in near-term for residents, students, workers, and businesses (e.g., Boulder Public Library Wi-Fi Hotspot Program)
- Monitor economic and business trends likely to persist beyond immediate recovery to inform the city's longer-term Community Broadband Phase 2.0 planning
- Partnership opportunities to aid in bridging the digital divide (meeting the needs of students, workers, and businesses)
- Process improvements and policy considerations impacting the ease of doing business in Boulder

Council should expect that a locally focused Economic Recovery Strategy will be developed over the next quarter in consultation with Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance partners and a cross-departmental staff team. While this strategy may differ from initiatives spearheaded by state and county organizations, staff will continue to seek and prioritize initiatives that might benefit from leveraged coordination through public-public and public-private partnerships.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the above-referenced analyses, staff plans to adjust previously communicated economic recovery initiatives to further align with the Community Vitality Strategic Plan (Strategic Goal 3/Pursuit of Vitality – Attachment A) and other plans of the city.

Staff will continue to bring the community information on resources provided by federal, state and other entities and will closely watch discussions related to housing, employment, sustainability, technology or infrastructure programs created by the federal government to aid economic recovery. The city anticipates that this work will continue to be performed in concert with Boulder Business Response and Recovery Alliance partners, including the University of Colorado and the Boulder Economic Council.

Council should expect the following additional touch points:

- Q1 2021 – Information Packet Item regarding federal consideration of recovery/stimulus resources, testing/personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccine-related information (in coordination with Boulder County Public Health)
- 4/27/21 - Financial Update including an update on Sales and Accommodation Tax performance
- Q2 2021 – Budget proposal potentially including realignment of program dollars supporting primary employer retention, small business retention, workforce development and affordable and inclusive goods

Council should feel free to refer any questions or suggestions related to this Information Packet Item or Boulder’s Economic Recovery Strategy to Yvette Bowden, assistant city manager and director of Community Vitality (BowdenY@BoulderColorado.gov).

Links to Resources

¹ “What will be normal this fall?” COVID-19 Impact Survey, *CO-LABS*, April 2020, <https://www.co-labs.org/post/what-will-be-normal-this-fall-covid-19-impacts-survey>

“Telecommuting will likely continue long after the pandemic,” *Brookings Institution*, April 6, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/06/telecommuting-will-likely-continue-long-after-the-pandemic/>

² “How much will remote work continue after the Pandemic?” *Working Knowledge*, Harvard Business School, August 24, 2020, [How Much Will Remote Work Continue After the Pandemic? - Harvard Business School Working Knowledge \(hbs.edu\)](https://www.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/working-knowledge-articles/how-much-will-remote-work-continue-after-the-pandemic)

³ “The rise of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic,” *World Economic Forum*, April 29, 2020, [The rise of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/articles/the-rise-of-online-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic)



Community Vitality

2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Mission: We support the people's pursuit of a shared vision of place through the management of Boulder's special districts, administration of parking and access services, and cultivation of economic resiliency for the entire community.

Vision: To facilitate an economically resilient community through stewardship of vibrant public places, excellence in service delivery, and support of opportunity and social mobility for all.

Values: Integrity, Collaboration, Innovation, Customer Service, Respect.

Strategic Goal #1: Access for People

Definition: To support inclusive, multi-modal access to neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions throughout the City to facilitate economic activity and support quality of life. We do this by managing programs, policies, and public infrastructure, including parking structures, and related enforcement operations.

Objective 1.1: Pursue new products and program changes and expansions that enhance multi-modal access, improve the customer experience, and provide ease of access to key economic centers.

Objective 1.2: Lead a parking pricing assessment and program changes to improve access, increase mobility options, and reflect industry standards.

Objective 1.3: Increase proactive outreach and communications to stakeholders, residents, the University, and visitors in the pursuit of greater compliance and improved customer experience.

Objective 1.4: Invest in existing infrastructure to enhance and extend life of district-owned assets and develop a strategic asset plan for future opportunities.

Objective 1.5: Set and achieve customer service enhancements such as, reducing in-person wait times, setting standards for responsiveness to customer issues, and further development of partnerships.

Strategic Goal #2: Vision of Place

Definition: To facilitate a shared vision among Boulder's centers of economic activity to enhance culture, connection, and community. Supporting the stewardship of public assets within managed districts and other economic centers for the purpose of fostering connections between people and place.

Objective 2.1: Utilize existing programs to contribute to the city-wide Vision Zero goals; safety enhancements for pedestrians, bikes, and vehicles.



Community Vitality

2020 – 2022 Strategic Plan

Objective 2.2: Enhance investment and partnerships in projects that improve the look and feel of centers of economic activity, including, but not limited to, public art, creative lighting, wayfinding, and other infrastructure that contributes to positive environmental design.

Objective 2.3: Contribute to the success of inclusive signature special events that enhance the cultural opportunities within special managed districts through shared coordination, partnering on communications, and proactive contact with event organizers.

Objective 2.4: Partner with other city departments and external stakeholders to test solutions to the challenges of curbside management and enhanced regional transit service.

Strategic Goal #3: Pursuit of Vitality

Definition: To facilitate a diverse and dynamic economy where residents, the University and businesses grow and succeed together through strategic partnerships (internal and external), policies, and programs. To support an environment for innovation and cultivating a skilled and diverse workforce through sponsorships, outreach, research, education, and planning in advancement of financial security, economic opportunity, and social mobility for all.

Objective 3.1: Revamp and enhance existing business programs and sponsorships to better support goals of financial security, economic opportunity, and social mobility for all. Including leading the direct support of targeted business (i.e. women, minority-owned, etc.) through grants, technical assistance, and access to affordable commercial space.

Objective 3.2: Serve as primary point of contact for prospective and existing businesses in key sectors, the University and School District, top-tier employers, and/or targeted businesses to assist in problem-solving.

Objective 3.3: Create and advance a city-wide retail strategy that prioritizes retention and promotes inclusive goods and affordability through recruitment, policies, and other new programs (including piloting affordable commercial activities).

Objective 3.4: Cultivate partnerships to strategically strengthen opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization in alignment with city goals and desired community outcomes.

Objective 3.5: Assisting in the tracking of key economic indicators and serve as a conduit for producing proactive information to assist in community response to important trends including aligned projects with EV partners and the University of Colorado.