

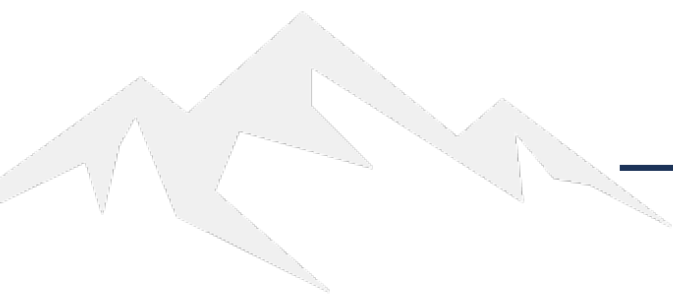


**MARCH 2024**

## **CLOSER TO HOME:**

*Local Government Solutions to Colorado's Toughest Challenges*

Authors: Kristi Burton Brown, Advance Colorado Institute Executive Vice President and Michael Tsogt, Advance Colorado Policy Analyst



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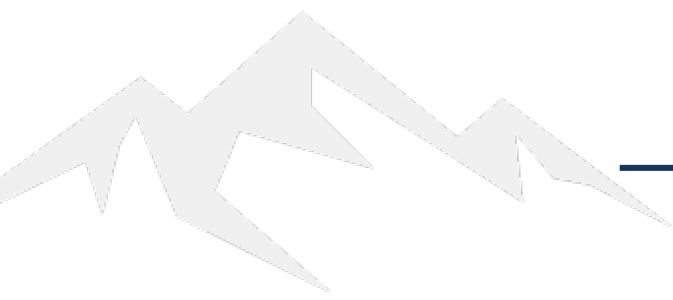
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a time when Americans' trust in the federal government is at rock bottom, citizens in Colorado and across the country are increasingly relying on local government to tackle today's toughest problems, including homelessness, mental health, and crime.

With more than two-thirds of Americans expressing faith in the ability of local governments to effectively address difficult challenges, according to a recent Gallup survey, it's important to examine how Colorado counties and municipalities are winning these battles.

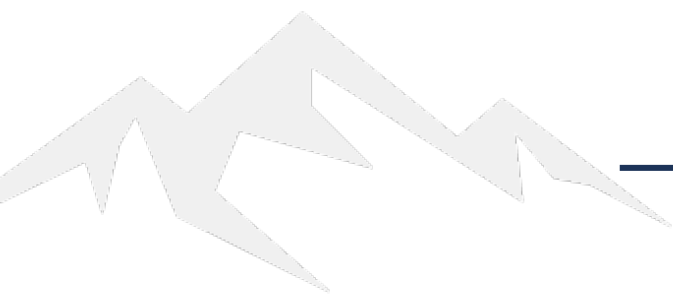
At the Advance Colorado Institute, we have taken an in-depth look at best practices and compiled examples of model policies that other local governments can and should enact.

This Advance Colorado Model Local Policies Report examines six key areas of local policymaking:

- Homelessness
- Public Safety
- Auto Theft
- Mental Health
- Fiscal Policy
- Public Spaces

The report offers specific model policies that could be enacted by local governments throughout Colorado.





## GENERAL FINDINGS

Local governments should investigate and embrace ways to partner with local nonprofit organizations to deal with specific policy issues they are facing.

In Colorado Springs, the City partnered with the Springs Rescue Mission to address aspects of the homelessness crisis in their streets.

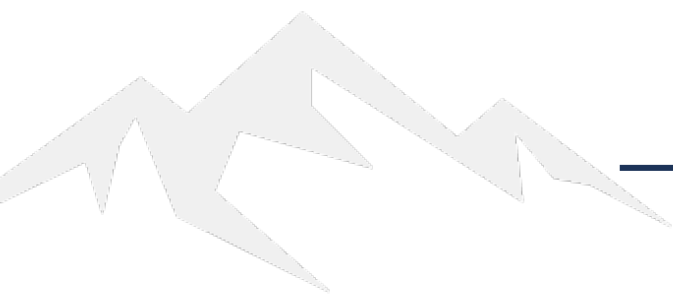
Based on the idea that the government can't successfully do it all, this strategy is effective and replicable in other Colorado cities for any number of policy problems.

Mesa County, El Paso County, and Douglas County show us that when counties are proactive in crafting policy, they can find effective and creative ways to mitigate the issues their residents are facing.

Often, this requires enforcing consequences (homelessness), funding what a city believes in (law enforcement), and ensuring that adequate training and community partnerships are available for those responsible for serving the community (mental health).

The cities of Aurora, Westminster, and Lone Tree reveal the kind of responsible policymaking and governance required to stay on top of the issues that plague their communities.

Whether it's preparing for the future, such as Lone Tree's policies of conservative fiscal management and promoting public spaces, or quickly stepping up to solve an immediate crisis when the state government fails to act, such as Aurora's and Westminster's ordinances addressing auto crimes in their cities, these municipalities have enacted model local policies that other localities should study and replicate.



## INTRODUCTION

Local government is closest to the people, and the effects of local policy can be felt on a daily basis. The Advance Colorado Model Local Policies Report intends to evaluate and recommend local policies that are a) innovative, b) crafted to solve a specific problem, and c) successful.

When local governments take matters into their own hands instead of waiting for the state, delivering a safe, healthy, affordable, and beautiful community for residents is possible. The cities and counties in this report show us the path forward.

Effectively addressing homelessness is one of the top issues facing local communities statewide. The City of Colorado Springs – in partnership with the nonprofit Springs Rescue Mission – stands out in its approach to homelessness.

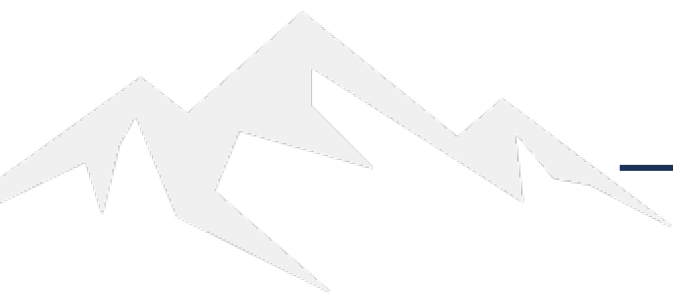
We will also look at how Mesa County recently took a stronger step to address homelessness in their county and is modeling a solution for other local governments.

Public safety increases when law enforcement is supported. El Paso County's proactive steps in support of its law enforcement officers are crucial for the safety of a large community that includes urban, suburban, and rural areas.

We will examine how the County Commissioners and the Sheriff's Office are actively supporting their officers in effective ways that help curb crime and increase residents' safety.

Auto crime, specifically auto theft, has been a massive hindrance to Colorado communities, especially on the Front Range. Aurora's City Council had enough of the state's inability to deal with the issue.

We will assess the policies they implemented in 2022 and see if these simple but innovative policies have had an effect on auto theft in Colorado's third-



largest city. We will also assess Westminster's four ordinances that were passed to address auto crime.

Declining mental health in Colorado remains among the top priorities in our state's legislature every year. And yet, little is actually done to address the crisis on a state level. Plastic bag fees and raiding TABOR receive more attention than the lives at stake every day.

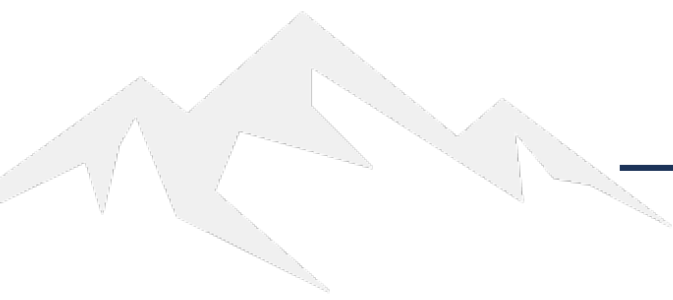
In the absence of effective state action, Douglas County's Mental Health Initiative with its Community Response Teams and Care Compact are prime examples of local government taking the matter into its own hands and finding answers for residents without waiting for a bigger government to get there first.

Taxes and fiscal responsibility are a common topic of conversation at the state and federal levels. But fiscal responsibility is also key at the local level for our cities and counties to govern well and effectively.

Balanced budgets, transparent and accountable spending, and low taxes are all possible locally. Reserves are one tool at the disposal of local governments if they plan wisely, and the City of Lone Tree's Capital Reserves and Working Reserves policies will be evaluated in this report.

Colorado is one of the most naturally beautiful states in the country, and tourists flock here annually to experience hiking, skiing, water sports, and more. Our cities should help citizens experience more of Colorado's natural beauty by creating vibrant, clean public spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy.

Here, we'll turn again to the City of Lone Tree for its visionary public spaces policy. We'll also report on Woodland Park's part in keeping Colorado beautiful.



## HOMELESSNESS

The homelessness crisis in Colorado is extremely serious and getting worse.

The recently released 2023 Colorado State of Homelessness Report shows a 150 percent increase in chronic homelessness in the state over the last ten years. The report counted 14,439 people experiencing homelessness in Colorado, with the true number of people experiencing homelessness falling somewhere between 14,439 and 134,197. Overall, homelessness increased by 39% in one year, making it the fourth-largest percentage increase in the country, right behind New Hampshire, New Mexico, and New York. More than two-thirds of the state’s homeless population resides in the seven counties of the Denver metro area. (1)

14,439



Total number of Coloradans experiencing homelessness according to PIT count

134,197



Individuals without stable housing covered by Medicaid in 2022

17,957



Students experiencing homelessness, doubled-up, or unstably housed in the 2021-2022 school year

30,409



People who accessed homelessness services in Denver between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023

39%



Increase in overall homelessness in the last year according to PIT count

150%



Increase in people experiencing chronic homelessness over the last ten years from PIT data

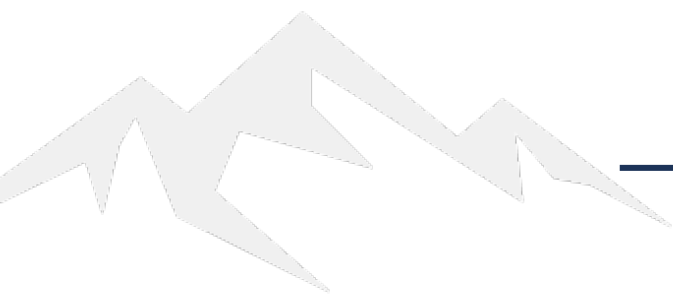
(1)

### **City of Colorado Springs: Reducing Homelessness Through Public-Nonprofit Partnerships**

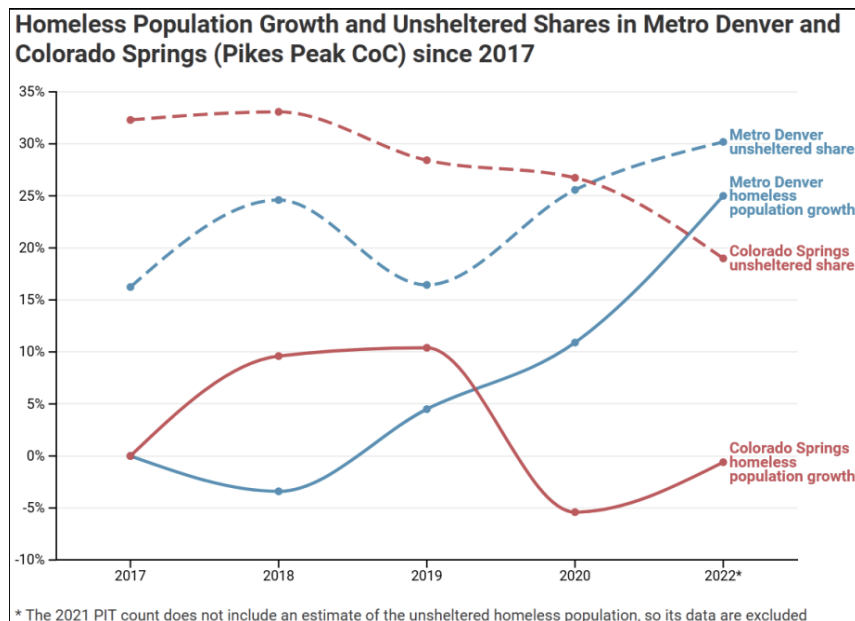
[Link to Model Policy](#)

Creating partnerships that harness the skills and resources of both the public and non-profit sectors has proven to be an effective model for not only reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness but also providing help and hope to homeless men and women.

The Common Sense Institute released a [report](#) of a side-by-side comparison of homelessness in Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado’s two largest



cities. The report found that Colorado Springs was more effective than Denver in handling the homelessness crisis – and unlike most other Front Range communities, Colorado Springs has not experienced a rapid increase in its homeless population in the last few years. (2)



(2)

The difference in results is tied to the intentional and successful strategy launched by leaders in Colorado Springs to partner with local nonprofits and homeless shelters. An instructive example is the city’s work with Springs Rescue Mission, the largest local homeless shelter.

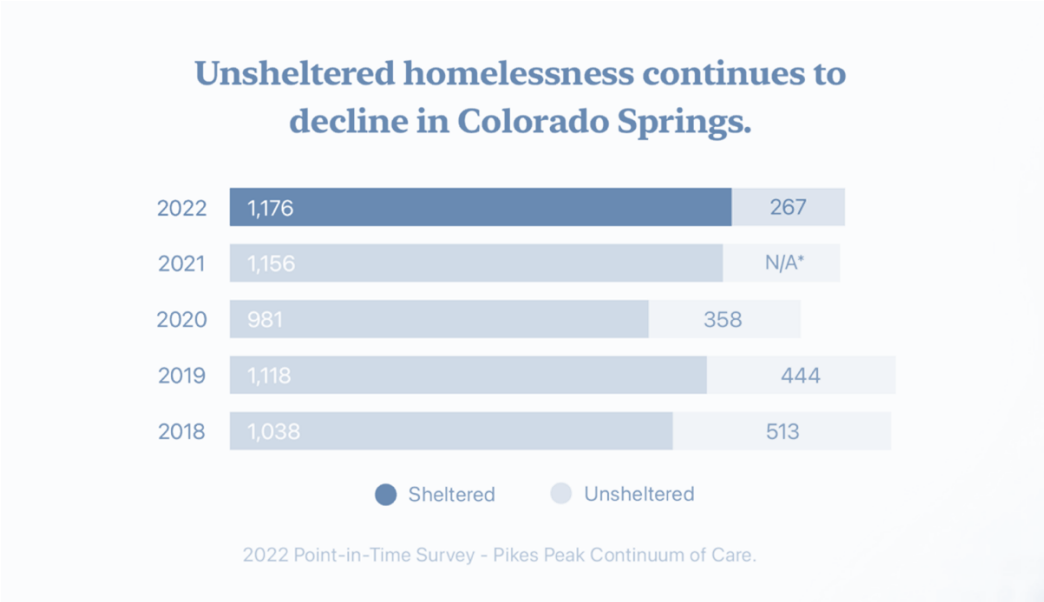
The Springs Rescue Mission offers a comprehensive “treatment first” approach. In contrast to the increasingly controversial and troubled “housing-first” policy used by Denver, treatment first includes addiction recovery programs, health services, meals, showers, laundry services, facilitating job placements, emergency shelter, permanent housing, and transitional housing.



# Colorado Springs more effective than Denver in handling homelessness crisis, report finds

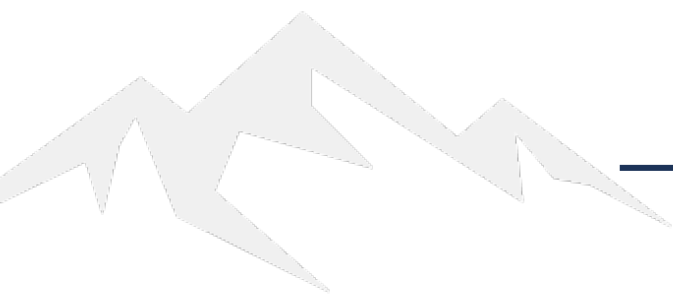
(3)

Much of the success of the faith-based Springs Rescue Mission is found in its emphasis on escaping the cycle of chronic homelessness – precisely where “housing-first” often falls short.



(4)

The city supports the work of Springs Rescue Mission and other effective nonprofits with direct funding, placing an emphasis on efficiency and collaboration rather than having competing public and nonprofit entities battling homelessness. Via its Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program, the City uses funds received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to partner with and provide grant funding to the Springs Rescue Mission. (5)



According to the City's [website](#), the beneficiaries of the ESG funding must serve populations that meet at least one of HUD's categories of homelessness. The four categories are literally homeless, imminent risk of homelessness, homeless under other federal statutes, or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence.

*"The City of Colorado Springs plays a crucial role in ensuring that no one is left without shelter in times of crisis. Their grant funding fuels the Mission's emergency shelter programs, offering a warm refuge to those facing the harshest elements of homelessness. This collaboration highlights the power of local government and nonprofits working hand in hand to provide immediate relief and hope for a better tomorrow."*

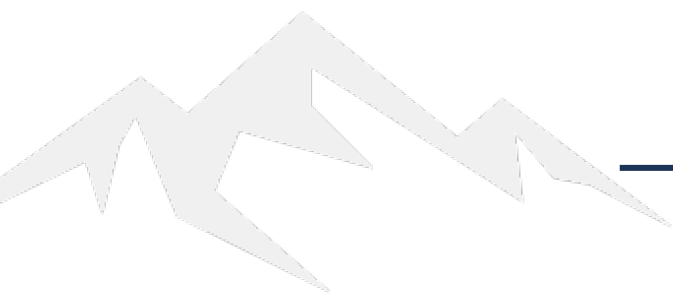
*Jack Briggs  
President & CEO  
Springs Rescue Mission*

The Springs Rescue Mission welcomes people from all four categories of homelessness. Since these categories are broad, it is not difficult for other cities receiving HUD funding to design a grant program for nonprofits serving the homeless population in their local area. (5)

The city didn't stop at simply providing funding. In coordination with the Pikes Peak Continuum of Care, city staff developed [written standards](#) for providing assistance with ESG funds. (6)

This wise decision by the municipal government is not only the key to Colorado Springs' success but is one that other local governments can easily pursue. The implicit acknowledgment of the local government that government alone cannot solve this problem is key to long-term success.

We encourage cities to investigate the Colorado Springs model and begin supporting their local successful nonprofits with funding for emergency shelters.



The Springs Rescue Mission has received numerous awards for excellence and collaboration; it maintains a Four Star “Exceptional Charity” rating with Charity Navigator.

*“It is incumbent on every generation to find a way to serve those members in severe need. And it is incumbent on every member of a community to do the work to make the community better. What sets Colorado Springs apart, is that we really do live the ethos that we all—government, private, nonprofit, and faith-based sectors-- work in active partnership to create pathways out of poverty for any person or family who finds themselves on the streets of our city.”*

*Alison Murray  
Former Board Chair  
Springs Rescue Mission*

Governor Jared Polis has **expressed** that the state of Colorado “wanted to learn from cities like Colorado Springs” for its success in handling homelessness, in large part due to the partnership with nonprofits like the Springs Rescue Mission. (4)

## **Mesa County: Using Enforcement to Curb Homelessness**

[Link to Model Policy](#)

Effectively addressing homelessness often requires elected officials to use the legal authority at their disposal. When Mesa County began receiving an uptick in complaints regarding individuals residing on public land, the Board of County Commissioners established new limitations via Ordinance 14 – which is noteworthy because it is enforceable and includes fines to ensure necessary compliance.

According to the **ordinance**, “residing” means “temporarily or permanently sleeping, cooking, or otherwise engaging in activities of daily living, including having and storing paraphernalia of daily living such as clothing, personal hygiene items, or cooking equipment, or using shelter including any cover or protection from the elements other than clothing (such as a tent, sleeping bag, vehicle, or other structure or material). The term does not include napping during the day or picnicking.” (7)

**Section 4. Unlawful Acts.**

4.1 Any of the following shall be a violation of this Ordinance and shall be subject to the remedies and penalties provided for in this ordinance:

(a) Temporarily or permanently residing on property owned by Mesa County, including, but not limited to, county road rights-of-way, is prohibited except where expressly authorized by Mesa County ordinance, rule, regulation, order, contractual agreement, or official signage.

(7)

Mesa County Commissioners **told** reporters: “This is not an ordinance to try to go out and fine whoever we can find, but rather an enforcement mechanism to help us get people who are, you know, camping on county lands, on county right of way. We want to get them to a better place.”

(9)



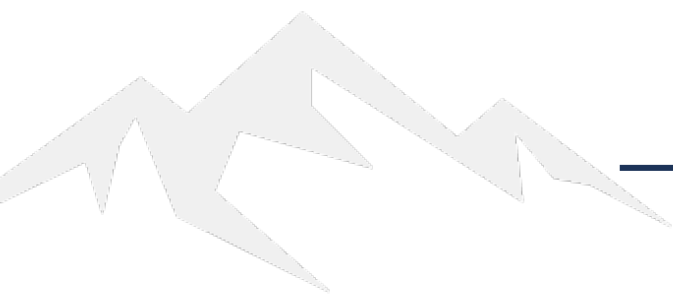
(8)

**Section 1. Purpose.**

The purpose of this ordinance is to promote the general public welfare and safety throughout Mesa County, Colorado by establishing limitations on residing on Mesa County owned lands, which law shall govern residing on Mesa County owned land in Mesa County, Colorado.

(7)

For Mesa County Commissioner Cody Davis, Ordinance 14 was a proactive step to ensure that public lands remain safe, clean, and enjoyable for all



County residents. Maintaining the beauty and safety of county lands was and still is a priority for Mesa County. Commissioner Davis reiterated that the fines are a last resort and that the ultimate goal is compliance through cooperation.

Ultimately, for Mesa County, the ordinance is about responsibility, focusing on ensuring that those who damage public lands are held accountable for their actions.

**6.6 Disposition of Fines and Forfeitures.** The fine for a first offense shall be \$200.00; for a second offense shall be \$300.00 and for a third and/or subsequent offense(s) it shall be \$400.00. Fines shall be assessed per violation and each day shall be deemed a separate violation. All fines and forfeitures for the violation of this Ordinance shall be paid to the Treasurer of Mesa County within thirty (30) days of receipt and shall be deposited into the General Fund of Mesa County.

(7)

Mesa County’s approach to its homelessness situation illustrates what can happen when local government feels the support and trust of its residents.

In turn, the Mesa County Commissioners implemented a more aggressive policy to confront an issue that was directly affecting the safety and health of its citizens.

When it comes to solving the homelessness crisis, our review of local policies has found that policies must have real teeth to ensure that measures are enforceable and that there is ongoing transparency and accountability for results.

The examples of Colorado Springs and Mesa County demonstrate there are practical, effective, and straightforward solutions to Colorado’s rising homelessness challenges that can be replicated across Colorado.

Enforceable, proactive policies can be combined with effective nonprofit partnerships across the state to solve homelessness.



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## PUBLIC SAFETY

When it comes to lowering crime, it is essential to have a vibrant, active law enforcement community that is encouraged to do their job well and empowered by the support and confidence of local elected officials. When a community's law enforcement is emboldened to enforce the law, that community is safer.

### ***El Paso County and Greenwood Village: Creating a Culture of Law Enforcement Support***

[\*Link to Model Policy\*](#)

One way local governments can create a culture of support for law enforcement is to indemnify the officers and set up objective processes surrounding “good faith” determinations. When an officer is indemnified, the local government takes on the legal liability if things go wrong between police and a member of the public, as long as the officer was acting in good faith with the best information available at the time.

In 2020, a bill known as [\*\*SB20-217\*\*](#) became law in Colorado and limited an officer's qualified immunity. This resulted in officers across the state resigning from their jobs in order to prevent liability from a split-second decision that would force them to be personally on the hook for \$25,000. SB20-217 left it up to local governments to determine if officers acted in good faith and would therefore be indemnified. The complicating factor – recognized by many members of law enforcement – is the question of who makes the “good faith” determination at the local level. <sup>(10)</sup>

The El Paso County Board of Commissioners took a step in the right direction in 2020 when it passed a resolution relating to the indemnification of law enforcement officers. The resolution went a step beyond cementing indemnification. It also set up an objective process for making a “good faith” determination. Instead of leaving this decision up to elected officials – who can be pressured by the community or anti-law enforcement organizations – the decision now rests with a committee of experts. <sup>(11)</sup>



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## **RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING A COMMITTEE TO DETERMINE INDEMNIFICATION OF SWORN EMPLOYEES OF THE EL PASO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE IN CERTAIN CIVIL ACTIONS**

(11)

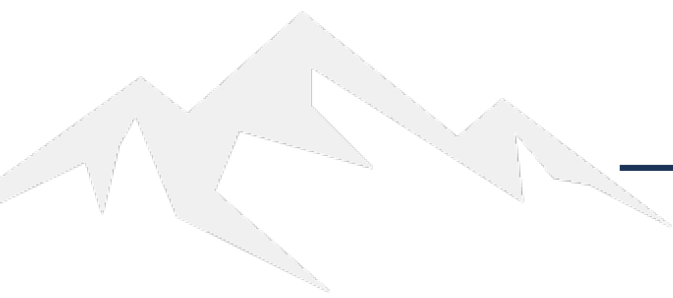
El Paso County ensured that members of the committee were familiar with good faith measures and the type of high-pressure, split-second decisions law enforcement officers must make. The sheriff and a risk officer are both on the committee. Moving the good faith determination to a committee of experts instead of elected officials provides objectivity and fairness to an officer while still protecting the community. El Paso County commissioners report that this resolution is one small piece of a culture they have created that supports law enforcement. (11)

**WHEREAS, the Act requires a political subdivision of the state to indemnify its employees for such a claim unless the peace officer's employer determines the officer did not act upon a good faith and reasonable belief that the action was lawful, at which point the peace officer is personally liable for five percent of the judgment or \$25,000, whichever is less; and**

(11)

Greenwood Village also passed a resolution in 2020 to indemnify their law enforcement officers, in a measure broader than the one enacted by El Paso County. Under the Greenwood Village ordinance, a determination of good faith is not required for officers to be indemnified by the city. When criticized, [the city responded](#) that it had a better method of holding law enforcement officers accountable for bad actions, when necessary:

*"As with any inappropriate conduct, we have retained the right to discipline including termination of an officer from his or her position understanding that they will never be able to get a job again in the profession to which many have devoted their lives. are subject to criminal liability and jail as a consequence of their actions. However based on our workforce, training and culture that have existed for a long time in our City, we do not believe that the added potential punishment of \$25,000 judgment will affect their actions one way or another in those few seconds of crisis when officers have to make split-second life or death decisions." (12)*



Both local governments believe that when cities and counties publicly back their law enforcement, the overall safety of their communities improves because officers are free to do their jobs without worrying about a damaging financial effect on their own families or lives.

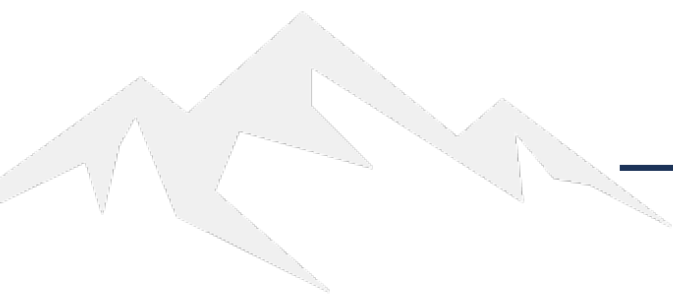
In addition to creating an effective process to indemnify law enforcement officers, the El Paso County Sheriff's Office and the County Commissioners have taken extensive action to build trust between law enforcement and the local community. Here is a partial list of other important actions taken and policies passed:

- Building out an extensive neighborhood watch program
- Fostering community engagement with law enforcement through Coffee with a Cop
- Utilizing cross warrants throughout the Pikes Peak Region for efficient arrests
- Earning numerous accreditations for the Sheriff's Office (Less than 100 sheriff's offices across the nation have achieved El Paso's level since 1993.)
- Awarding a pension to a deputy sheriff's wife when he died in the line of duty, even though he had not served long enough to earn an automatic pension
- Budgeting an extra \$100K to the Sheriff's office so that high-quality body armor could be purchased for anti-drug operations
- Launching multiple [BHCON \(Behavioral Health Connection\) units](#) (14)
  - County Commissioner Stan Vander Werf explains that these units include a "deputy sheriff and a behavioral health professional. They respond to calls with certain characteristics [and are] 99% successful at de-escalation without incarceration." (13)

Our vision is to ensure El Paso County remains the safest and most enjoyable place to live and visit in the state of Colorado. We are committed to holding the highest standard for public safety to achieve a county free of crime and public disorder.

It is of the utmost importance that our local law enforcement agencies know the trust and respect their communities and elected leaders have for their jobs done well. Due to the culture of support built in El Paso County, the Sheriff's Office is fully staffed as of February 2024, even while other areas of the state struggle to recruit and retain officers.





## AUTO CRIMES

One of the most pressing crime issues statewide is the soaring rate of auto theft, in which Colorado ranked **first** in the nation in 2022. Even Denver Mayor Mike Johnston's car was stolen last November, the second time he has been a car theft victim. (15)

In late 2022, **FBI data** showed that four Colorado cities ranked in the top ten cities in the United States for motor vehicle thefts:

- Denver (Ranked 2nd)
- Aurora (Ranked 3rd)
- Westminster (Ranked 8th)
- Pueblo (Ranked 9th)

(16)

According to the **Common Sense Institute's study** on the economic consequences of auto theft, in 2022, auto thefts in Colorado reached 801.2 thefts per 100,000 residents, cost \$277 million in increased auto insurance, and reduced state GDP by \$158 million. (16)

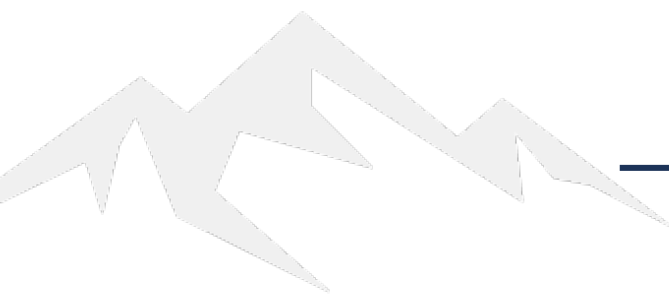
Rather than wait for the State Legislature to strengthen criminal laws to punish and deter car thieves, two of these cities – run by Republican mayors and Republican city councils – proactively enacted measures to protect local residents and businesses.

### ***Aurora: Lowering Car Thefts by 25 Percent***

[Link to Model Policy 1](#). [Link to Model Policy 2](#).

Ranking second in the state for car thefts was unacceptable to Aurora's elected leaders, and they took common-sense steps to stem this criminal tide, in a year when state lawmakers were unable – or unwilling – to tackle the crisis effectively.

Aurora Mayor Pro Tem Dustin Zvonek led the charge to pass an ordinance that heightened the mandatory penalties for auto theft and a companion resolution creating a fund to help cover the cost of impounds for people who had their cars stolen and needed to recover them. (17)



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“Our state has made a number of crimes more permissive and this led to a skyrocketing number of motor vehicle thefts across our state and across our city,” Dustin Zvonek [told](#) council members during debate over the ordinance. (18)

Specifically, the Aurora ordinance has three components:

- For offenders who plead guilty or no contest, or are convicted of auto theft, there is a mandatory minimum 60-day jail sentence.
- Repeat offenders of motor vehicle theft or another similar offense, whether in Aurora or elsewhere in the state or in another state, face a mandatory minimum 120-day jail sentence.
- If an offender fails to appear in court, he or she faces a mandatory minimum 10-day jail sentence.

(19)

FOR AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AURORA, COLORADO, AMENDING SECTIONS OF THE CITY CODE PERTAINING TO MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES FOR CERTAIN OFFENSES IN THE AURORA MUNICIPAL CODE AND OTHER AMENDMENTS TO THE CITY CODE TO COMBAT THE INCREASE IN MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT AND RELATED OFFENSES

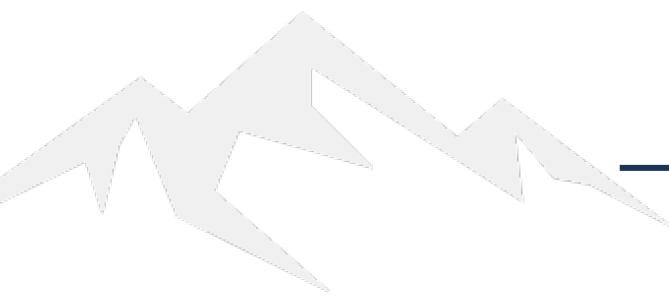
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The companion resolution to Zvonek’s ordinance supports victims of auto theft by creating a victims’ fund that provides reimbursement for the impound fee and other costs incurred by victims. (20)

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AURORA, COLORADO, AUTHORIZING THE CITY OF AURORA TO IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMBAT THE INCREASE IN MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT AND RELATED OFFENSES

(20)

State laws passed over a seven-year period – including [HB14-1266](#), [HB19-1225](#), and [SB21-271](#) – reduced penalties for car theft and required local law enforcement to allow car thieves back out on the street and in the communities the same day they steal and are caught, with no bail posted.



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Sometimes, the criminals would refuse to show up in court and remain on the run, often participating in car theft rings. (21)

Despite the state's persistent soft-on-crime approach, Aurora's elected officials acted to pursue the safety of their residents and the general public by getting tougher on crime at the local level.

According to Aurora's former interim Police Chief Art Acevedo, as of December 2023, the two ordinances in Aurora have already resulted in a 25.5 percent reduction in auto theft in the city. (22)

### ***City of Westminster: Combatting Multiple Auto Crimes***

[\*Link to Model Policy\*](#)

The City of Westminster, in the summer of 2023, passed a series of ordinances addressing auto crime in their city. The aspects of municipal code that they handled in the ordinances were street racing, joy-riding, car parts theft, restitution for victims, and amendments to the impoundment of vehicles. (23)

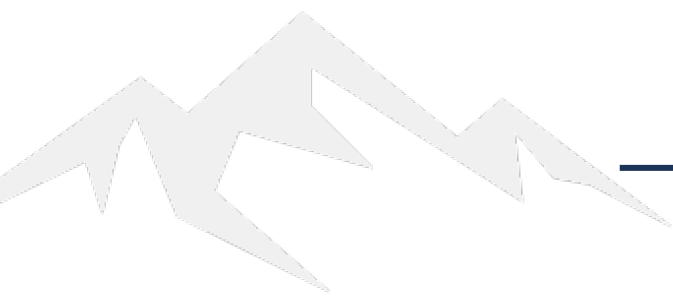
Vehicle thefts in Westminster alone have exploded from 859 in 2020 to 1,259 last year.

But the misery around auto-related crimes goes further than just theft and this city of 115,000 is determined to do something. Last week, Westminster passed on first reading four ordinances that would address street racing, joy-riding, car parts theft and quicker restitution for victims.

(24)

These ordinances passed in Westminster allowed the prosecution of auto-related offenses to be brought in municipal court rather than at the county level. Having the authority to prosecute locally makes it much easier for both the City and the victims of auto crime to receive justice. (25)

The ordinance regarding restitution requires that the amount of restitution must be determined within 91 days following the order of conviction. The defendant is obligated to pay that restitution. Restitution payments can include the cost of prosecution as well as covering the actual costs of



specific future treatments for victims, which includes pet animals injured during the crime. (25)

A significant change in municipal code through these ordinances was the inclusion of street racing as an act of public nuisance, thereby allowing law enforcement the authority to impound the vehicle used by the offenders. The City of Westminster had been receiving many reports from their residents about street racing. (24)

In 2022 and 2023, the Westminster Police Department worked with the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority to host free “catalytic converter

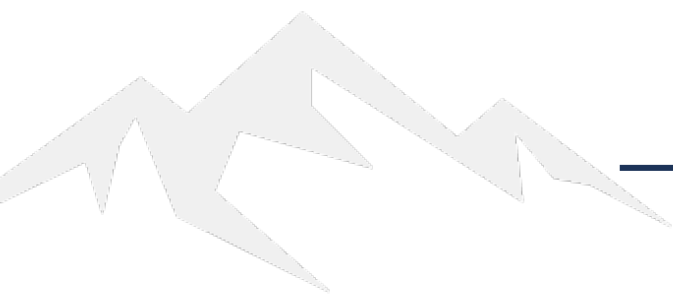
*Westminster Mayor Pro Tem David DeMott said the ultimate goal of the ordinances is to “hold people accountable and show Westminster is not the city to break the law in.”*

anti-theft kit” events for residents, making the city a less desirable place to commit auto crimes by empowering citizens to take action themselves. Statistics on auto crimes in Westminster will be available after the summer of 2024 when the city will have the opportunity to look at the measurable impact these new policies had in the first year of enforcement. (26)

(24)

Aurora and Westminster took the first step by recognizing the high levels of auto crime being committed in their cities. Local elected officials then developed proactive policies to deal with auto crime in their communities, refusing to concede more ground to rampant crime or throw their hands up and blame the state government for its inaction. Denver and Pueblo should be next as both cities have new mayors and Denver International [Airport experiences the highest rate of auto theft](#) in the state. (16)





## MENTAL HEALTH

According to Mental Health America’s yearly rankings on mental health, Colorado ranked 51<sup>st</sup> worst for adult mental health in 2021 and 45<sup>th</sup> in 2022. Colorado has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest rate of adults considering suicide in the nation today and is the **43<sup>rd</sup> worst state** when it comes to teen suicide. Mental health encompasses several conditions – not only suicidal thoughts – and Colorado, as a state, is not succeeding in fixing them. Many Band-Aids have been placed over the problem, but long-term solutions are few and far between. (27)

### ***Douglas County: Pioneering Solutions***

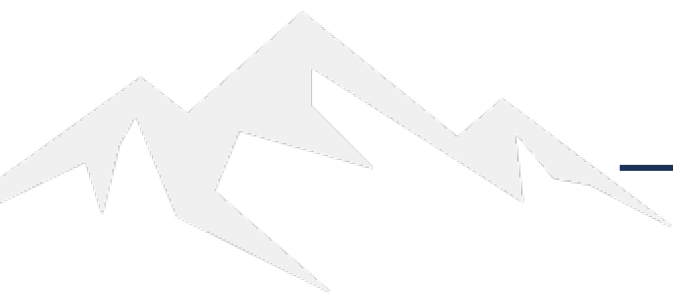
[\*Link to Model Policy\*](#)

One of the bright spots in Colorado’s mental health crisis is the Douglas County Mental Health Initiative. The Initiative includes a Care Compact and Community Response Teams. This Initiative was created in response to the trends of worsening mental health in Colorado and, specifically, as a response to a murder-suicide in Highlands Ranch and a school shooting. The county worked to identify “inefficient, ineffective processes or gaps in mental health.” (28)

A key facet of the Douglas County Mental Health Initiative is the partnerships with over 50 organizations in 20 different sectors. The Initiative’s coordinator reports that this broad partnership was intentional, with every partner bringing different strengths to the table, and that more is accomplished when the responsibility to serve is spread out.

A major **part** of the Initiative’s success has been Community Response Teams. (29)

These teams are made up of a law enforcement officer paired with a mental health professional to assist adults and youth in a mental health crisis. The officer and clinician work together for 40 hours each week, so they are a true team that understands how to work together while they serve people in crisis. As of 2023, Douglas County has nine teams, with two being youth-specific – a unique model that Fort Collins is now replicating. The youth teams build relationships with schools, school resource officers, and school



counselors to be available to serve youth experiencing mental health issues.  
(29)

Douglas County also partners with families instead of excluding parents in a mental health situation. Resource specialists “help families navigate the system,” and these specialists are not randomly assigned but, instead, must interview for the position and have specific crisis intervention training.

## Six years of CRT

- 9 fully staffed teams
- 7,500+ individuals served or referred (38% are youth)
- 3,900+ active 911 calls
- 6,400+ referrals
- 11,600+ successful encounters
- 862 suicidal subject calls, 33% 17 years old or younger
- 1,430 ED saves, 589 Jail diversions
- 4,200+ law enforcement officers relieved
- Estimated \$10.4 million in cost avoidance for Fire/EMS, emergency departments and jail



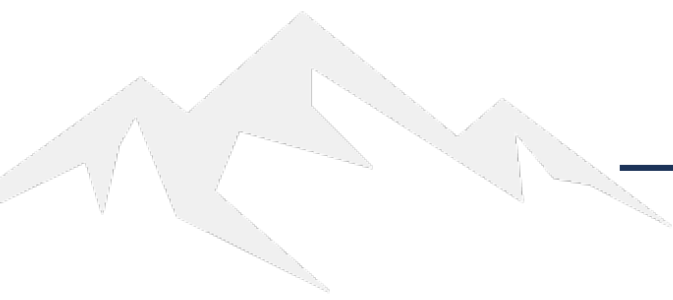
(30)

Community Response Teams are a major part of the County’s entire initiative, but there’s more. According to the initiative's blueprint, there are five goals:

1. Create a networked system of care
2. Rebrand mental health disorders and substance use disorders
3. Develop programs and interventions to address current gaps
4. Work on policy and systems improvements
5. Develop the workforce

(30)

Douglas County has determined an additional step that has made its Initiative more successful. While fire departments are often called to mental health situations, they generally are not equipped to deal with them. The Initiative has found a way to solve the problem through the broad partnership that has been built. DCMHI’s Coordinator explained that they worked with inpatient facilities and walk-in centers on a pre-approval so they could take a medical clearance for a patient directly from the fire department’s emergency response. Without this pre-approval, it can be very difficult to get people admitted into 72-hour hold facilities. Douglas County also credited Colorado Springs with having unique ideas to solve this problem and for generally having a good model that Douglas County used when originally implementing its own Initiative.



Douglas County's Care Compact has pioneered a solution to the fragmentation of Colorado's mental and health care systems. DCMHI's Coordinator explained, *"The more conditions one has, the harder it becomes to have comprehensive healthcare that equates to quality of life."* She explained that many people in a mental health crisis have *"layers of healthcare needs."*

## DCMHI Blueprint

- A plan for a community-based mental health system in Douglas County
- Five Goals
  1. Create a Networked System of Care
  2. Rebranding Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder
  3. Develop Programs and Interventions to Address current Gaps
  4. Work on Policy and Systems Improvements
  5. Develop the Workforce



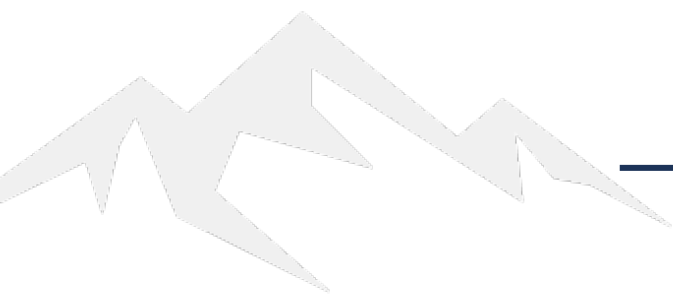
[Read the Blueprint online](#)

(30)

While the Community Response Teams provide an excellent initial response, most people need longer term solutions for hospital stays, court dates, outpatient mental health care, or disabilities. The Care Compact involves 15 community partners and brings them together to "share information and create a common, agreed upon plan for a client." The communication ensures efficiency and avoids duplicating services to promote quality of life for the clients.

Successful policies also receive funding when found to be effective. Douglas County has evidence that its Mental Health Initiative has directly saved lives. Last year, Douglas County accepted over \$600,000 in federal money for its Mental Health Initiative to reach its goals. (31)

Several other counties and cities have adopted Douglas County's model, but more could follow suit. Local governments across the state ought to examine this policy and see how they might be able to replicate it to fit the mental health needs in their communities. The state should also offer additional grants to localities that want to implement Douglas County's successful Community Response Team program and Care Compact, as we detail in our [Moving Colorado Forward: 2024](#) policy agenda. (32)



## FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Coloradans are fans of fiscal responsibility, the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR), and low taxes. One way state governments responsibly manage taxpayer monies is by setting up rainy-day funds. According to a 2018 Pew Research article, while most states have formal rainy day funds to prepare for the next economic downturn, it is much less common at the city and county levels.

In fact, only 16 out of 30 major U.S. cities have rainy-day funds codified by statute or ordinance. Fiscal responsibility on the city level looks like creating and maintaining reserves that protect against the next financial crisis, including a crisis caused by unexpected weather and natural disasters. (33)

### ***Lone Tree: Saving for the Future***

[\*Link to Model Policy 1.\*](#) [\*Link to Model Policy 2.\*](#)

The City of Lone Tree is ahead of many larger cities in Colorado and across the nation. The city models fiscal responsibility and management with two specific, forward-looking policies: the Working Reserve Policy and the Capital Reserves Policy.

The Working Reserves Policy intends to maintain the necessary working reserves to “mitigate current and future risks,” which could include an economic downturn, unexpected emergencies, natural disaster costs, capital asset acquisition, construction and improvement projects, and more. (34)

The policy has two main reserve goals it seeks to reach. First, the City should have at least two months (16.7%) of the current year’s budgeted operating expenditures. Second, the City should achieve and maintain a 30.0% reserve balance for its annual budget process, which includes the 3% emergency reserve that is required by TABOR. (34)





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### **Minimum and Target Levels**

The City will maintain a minimum working reserve balance of at least two months (16.7%) of the current year's budgeted operating expenditures. At the same time, the City will strive to achieve and maintain a 30.0% working reserve balance (which would include the 3% Emergency Reserve as required by TABOR) as part of its annual budget process.

(34)

The Capital Reserves Policy intends to accumulate and maintain capital reserves as part of its annual budgeting process. This ensures that the City of Lone Tree has the necessary fund balances to offset the costs of future projects. To achieve this end, the City has determined in this policy that they will “pay as you go,” minimizing debt borrowing and interest payments on that debt. (35)

The Capital Reserves Policy has four sections that describe how the policy works:

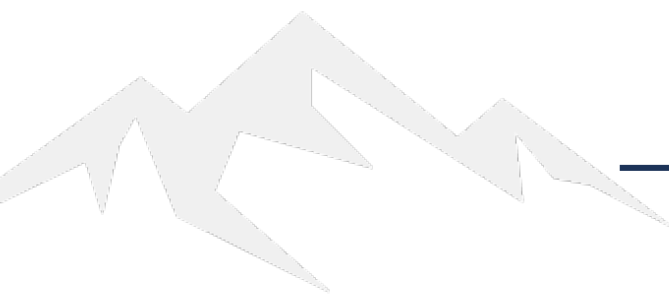
1. Capital projects and replacement program
2. Budgeting for capital reserves
3. Use of funds
4. Investing capital reserves balances

(35)

### **Budgeting for Capital Reserves**

Utilizing the five-year capital projections, the City will strive to fund a designated capital reserves fund balance within its budget that will be equal to at least twenty-five percent (25%) of the amount of the average aggregate projected cost over the five year period for all of the projects based on the scheduled timing of the projects. Moreover, the City will roll over any excess funds, subsequent to year-end closing, of unanticipated accumulated fund balances and will include any such excesses as part of the City's capital reserves, unless such excess funds are required to replenish the working reserve for anticipated and authorized uses.

(35)



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*“As is true in our personal lives, planning ahead for large expenditures and having savings sufficient to carry us through an unexpected crisis are key to Lone Tree's success. Information is also critical to good planning. Our five-year plan considers capital projects of all types and sizes supported by periodic evaluations of city infrastructure to limit the incidence of emergency repair or replacement to the extent possible. Any excess funds in the budget are directed first to the Working Reserves, and then to Capital Reserves. These policies have worked well for the City of Lone Tree.”*

*Wynne Shaw, Lone Tree Mayor Pro Tem*

Planning a budget for a local government – especially one that is about to grow as exponentially as Lone Tree – is no small feat. However, what’s more difficult is acting with foresight and prudently implementing the fiscal management necessary for effective governance.

Cities could look to Lone Tree’s reserve policies and see where they might be able to prepare better for the future and the unknown – and do so without relying solely on additional tax burdens for the people.



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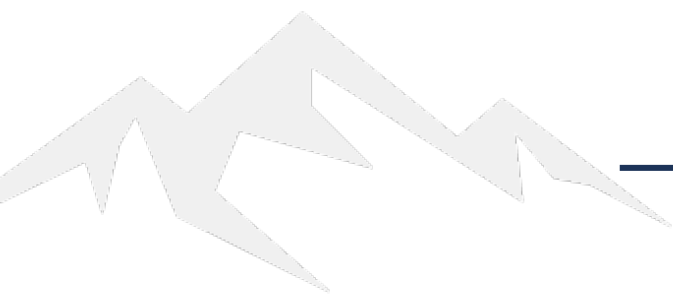
## **A Highlight on the Importance of Fiscal Reserves in El Paso County**

*“In 2017 when I was sworn in as a Commissioner, El Paso County was still recovering from the 2008 recession. At that time, we had just 6.4% of annual operating reserves available representing \$12.6M on a multi-hundred-million-dollar budget. We were nowhere close to the best practices recommendation of 16% reserves from the Government Finance Officers Association. With a lot of work, El Paso County now has a 23.5% operational reserve representing \$44.8M, a significant increase over 2017. We were able to accomplish this without raising taxes, with a Commissioner board dedicated to a fiscally healthy county, and a great staff that could make it happen.*

*It turned out having those reserves became essential to addressing the significant flooding that took place in El Paso in June of 2023. This weather event destroyed or significantly damaged 40 essential roads in El Paso. As a result, we applied for a federal disaster declaration which succeeded, but these funds required a local match. With our reserves, we were able to easily handle the matching funds requirement without dipping into our operating budget, thus allowing us to fully fund all other services to our constituents.*

*In the last 7 years, El Paso County not only dealt successfully with this and other contingencies including fires and COVID, we also continued to fully fund public safety, add new county parks, fund salary increases to address inflation, recapitalize a substantial part of our road fleet to increase road repairs and repaving, and return TABOR overages to our taxpayers, all without raising taxes. Today, El Paso County is in excellent fiscal shape with substantial reserves in place should the economy enter a recession or another disaster take place.”*

*Stan VanderWerf  
Chairman of the Board  
El Paso County Commissioners*



## PUBLIC SPACES

Colorado is known for having beautiful places to live, work, and raise families. Our citizens appreciate and look for clean, healthy environments to raise their families in and spend time outdoors. With thoughtful community development and planning, local governments can enact policies that recognize and create clean and healthy environments and will be able to preserve the beauty of their communities for the future.

### **City of Lone Tree: Healthy Public Spaces**

[Link to Model Policy](#)

Our cities should reflect the natural beauty and healthy environments found in our state that encourage people to go outside, breathe clean air, connect with others in person, and play without a constant focus on technology.

The City of Lone Tree’s public realm policy, found in its “Design Guidelines & Standards – Architecture and Site Planning” is a great example of what planning for the future looks like.

City of Lone Tree

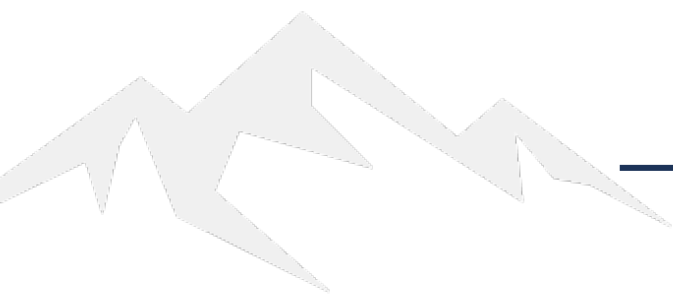
### Vision Statement



Lone Tree is a premier Colorado community connected by great neighborhoods, vibrant public spaces, a beautiful natural environment, and thriving businesses.

(36)

First adopted in 1997 and amended twice since, the vision statement of the policy reads simply: “Lone Tree is a premier Colorado community connected by great neighborhoods, vibrant public spaces, a beautiful natural environment, and thriving businesses.” (36)



The heart of making this vision work is Lone Tree’s Public Realm Policy, which is separated into four specific subsections:

1. Public spaces  
Goal: to “provide vibrant, inviting, safe and functional public spaces for year-round use that complement the character of the project and surrounding area and are accessible to people of all ages and abilities.”

2. Street/sidewalk experience  
Goal: to “create accessible, safe and inviting environments conducive to human interaction and activity at the street and sidewalk levels, with clear connections to building entryways and edges, and consideration for maintenance”

3. Lighting  
Goal: to “use a coordinated approach to energy efficient lighting design that creates inviting and safe environments, while minimizing light pollution and glare.”

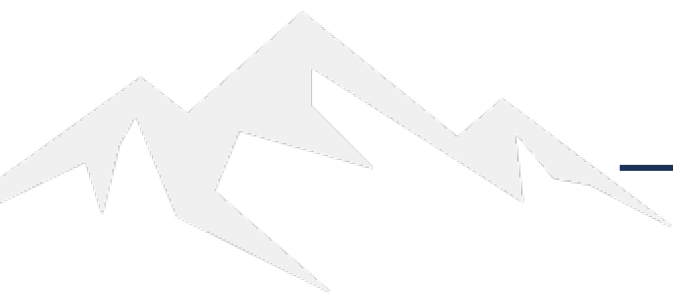
4. Signage  
Goal: to “enhance the appearance and economic vitality of the community by promoting high quality, creative and effective signage.” (36)

*“Thoughtful community planning lies at the heart of the Lone Tree experience. Whether you want to appreciate public art, enjoy beautiful views from a bench that is sunny in the winter and shaded in the summer, or discover well-lit and well-maintained areas near trails and transit, Lone Tree aims to ensure visitors have a delightful stay. Small details such as pedestrian lighting, structures that harmonize with the natural environment, and low water use landscaping demonstrate our commitment to preserving resources and enhancing our appreciation for the natural beauty found here. These elements, along with the residents and workforce that make up our vibrant community, collectively contribute to making the City of Lone Tree a place we proudly call home.”*

*Wynne Shaw, Lone Tree Mayor Pro Tem*

Most citizens are not preoccupied daily (or ever) with how their cities approach planning public spaces. But all citizens are affected by these plans constantly. We wanted to highlight this policy because we think the beauty of Lone Tree speaks for itself. This metro suburb has established its place in Colorado as a business- and family-friendly, growing community that highlights a healthy focus on the outdoors and connections between residents.





The workforce in the city is already at 25,000, with major financial, aerospace, engineering, healthcare, and technology businesses operating there. Lone Tree’s new RidgeGate development will soon be home to 20,000 new residents, more than doubling the city’s population. The smart planning by the city has been key to its coming exponential growth. (37)

### **Woodland Park: Focusing on Community Connections**

[Link to Model Policy](#)

There are other ways to conserve the beauty of our communities. “The City Above the Clouds” keeps a particular focus on preserving its public spaces.

Keep Woodland Park Beautiful, an officially recognized chapter of Keep America Beautiful – as well as a city-recognized committee – serves Woodland Park by promoting *“beautification efforts through education, enforcement, and most importantly, active community participation through our programs and events.”* (38)

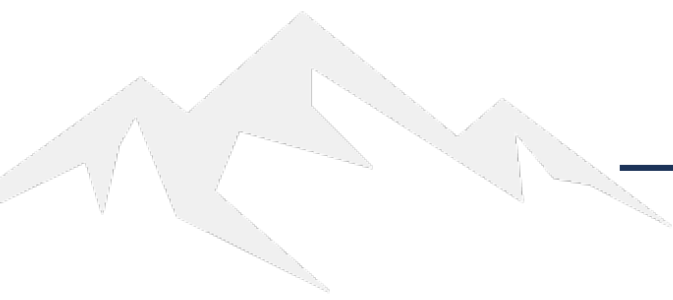
Every year, Keep Woodland Park Beautiful hosts a Spring Cleanup Celebration, where many in the community gather to clean up their city together. Making this a city-wide event opens the door to creating a local culture that takes personal responsibility for a healthy and clean natural environment. It recognizes that healthy cities and counties are built not only by preserving beauty and valuing a clean environment but also by placing value in relationships with other community members. (39)

[For the past two decades, the people of Woodland Park have united in a project to clean up the town. Led by Keep Woodland Park Beautiful, the annual Citywide Cleanup is Saturday.](#)

[“This is such a great event and it’s wonderful to see the community come together to help pitch in to keep our city clean,” said Kassidi Gilgenast, vice president of KPWB, a nonprofit organization.](#)

(39)

Whether it’s a city policy promoting and thoroughly planning the intentional, long-term beauty of the city or an annual spring clean-up with your neighbors, every community in Colorado can proactively create and maintain the health of their communities and build personal connections at the same time.



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## CONCLUSION

The Advance Colorado Model Local Policies Report examined six key areas of policymaking on the local level: homelessness, public safety, auto theft, mental health, fiscal policy, and public spaces.

The six cities (Colorado Springs, Aurora, Westminster, Lone Tree, Greenwood Village, and Woodland Park) and three counties (Mesa, El Paso, and Douglas) highlighted in this report show what it means to have the courage to govern responsibly for their communities: by effectively using the necessary and creative means at their disposal to craft successful policy, and by refusing to become complacent waiting for the state to act first.

The model local policies highlighted in this report are policies that are creative, practical, successful, and replicable by other cities and counties. Advance Colorado hopes that local elected officials and their residents across the state take what their fellow Coloradans are doing to solve the problems in their localities and replicate it, tailored to their communities' specific needs.

Because local government – being closer to its constituents, immersed in challenges neighborhood by neighborhood, and hearing directly from residents – can often act in a more rapid, agile, and creative fashion to craft practical solutions that work, change can often happen best at this level.

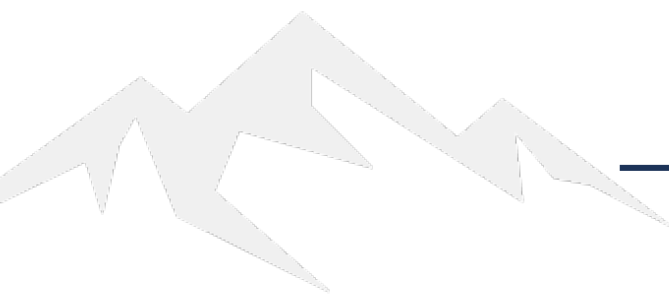


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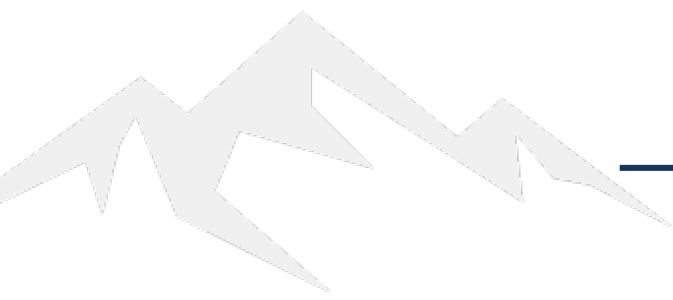
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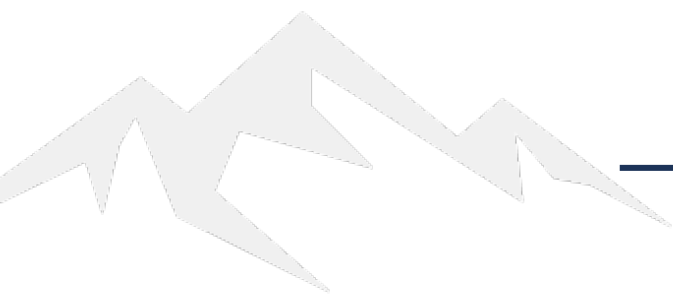
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## About the Authors



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Kristi is the Executive Vice President at the Advance Colorado Institute. She is the former Chairwoman of the Colorado Republican Party — the first woman to be elected in 40 years and the youngest Chair in Colorado Republican history. Kristi previously worked as a policy analyst for State Senator Tim Neville, helping to pass the Free Speech on Campus Bill and an anti-human trafficking law, both successful bipartisan efforts. Kristi is a constitutional attorney, focusing on First Amendment and Equal Protection issues, and is admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court. She is a former Associate Scholar with the Charlotte Lozier Institute and a current board member of the Boy Scouts' Greater Colorado Council and the Colorado Family Life Center. As the former managing editor of a news site, Kristi tutors 4th-6th graders in grammar and writing and is a guest host for the Dan Caplis Show on 630 KHOW. She lives with her family in Douglas County.



*Michael Tsogt*

Michael Tsogt is a Policy Analyst at the Advance Colorado Institute. His areas of policy and research include education, budget/fiscal matters, and TABOR. He has testified on a range of bills before the Colorado legislature, including a bill proposing education savings accounts for special needs and foster care kids in Colorado. During his undergraduate years, Michael was elected as an Academic Senator for student government, covered sports & entertainment for the student newspaper, and participated in several political fellowships and opportunities, including the Center for the Study of Government and the Individual as a Bastiat Fellow. Prior to COVID interrupting plans, Michael was accepted into a study abroad program at Oxford University where he had intended to study Aristotle and political philosophy for a semester. Michael graduated from the University of Colorado with a degree in political science. He and his wife live in Colorado Springs.

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