**Community Partnership Award Nomination**

**Project title**

City of Thornton and Adams 12 Five Star School District Civic Engagement Program

**Name of local government**

City of Thornton

**Name of cooperating local government(s), public agency, nonprofit organization or community group.**

Adams 12 Five Star School District

**Name, title, address, phone number, and email address of local government employee representing those responsible for project implementation. Designate one employee only.**

Gina Lantz, Communications Technician, 9500 Civic Center Drive, Thornton CO 80229, 303-538-7575

**Name, title, address, phone number and email address of employee at cooperating jurisdiction/agency responsible for or representing those responsible for project implementation.**

Janelle Albertson, Chief Communications Officer, Adams 12 Five Star Schools, 1500 E. 128th Ave., Thornton, CO 80241-2602

**E. Program Description**

The City of Thornton’s Civic Engagement Program is a 13-year partnership between the City and the Adams 12 Five Star School District that provides third grade students in the school district a real-world glimpse into the function and roles of their City’s government. The program consists of a half-day tour of the City and presentations on the history of the City, policy-making procedures, public safety, and city planning. The goal of the program is to foster greater curiosity and involvement in civic functions at a young age. As a result, the City’s population will continually be more educated and can more fully participate in the decision making process, which is an essential component in promoting the goals of Metro Vision as the entire Metro Area builds out.

**Define the problem or challenge this project addressed**

The program coincides with the School District curriculum regarding civics and government and fulfills the need to provide a real-world example of how the City functions.

**Describe the program implementation and cost**

The program was implemented through various City of Thornton Departments volunteering their work day time to lead group discussions with 3rd grad students about various City functions. The program is presented by the City to the School district at not cost to the School District.

**Describe the project and its operation.**

The program consists of a half-day tour of the City including presentations about city history, policy-making procedures, public safety and city planning. The day begins with a brief history of the City and a mock City Council hearing. In this section, students learn about civic responsibility and decision making in local government. Students learn about the history of Thornton, how many residents live in the City, and how Thornton got its name. Additionally, students learn what a City Council does and about the reasons why people form governments including the need for laws, safety, and order. As a culminating activity, students take part in a simple simulation of a city council meeting where they have to decide whether to the City law should be amended to increase the number of ducks permitted from two to three per home in order to appease a family with three ducks. They are expected to ask questions and participate in discussions about the issue to make an informed decision before voting on the issue.

After the history and City Council presentations, the students are broken down into three groups that rotate through the public safety and city planning portions of the program. The two public safety presentations teach students about the role the City plays in supplying supporting services such as police and fire protection. In one session, students visit the police station and learn about how the three Divisions of the Police Department--Administration, Patrol, and Detectives--serve the City. The highlight of this section includes a tour of the City jail and an opportunity to sit in a police vehicle to experience the Officer’s perspective from the front seat and a suspect’s from the back seat.

The second public safety session is a visit to the Fire Department where students learn about the various efforts it undertakes in the City, from fire to water safety and traffic accidents to paramedic calls. Students get to tour a City ambulance and learn about how a paramedic saves lives. They also learn about the standard fire fighting equipment on a fire engine and other tools used to help people (i.e., jaws of life, pick axe, etc). Lastly, the children are taught the importance of life-saving practices and how they can use them in their own homes

The third presentation, ‘How to Plan a City’, educates students about community planning. Planning staff from both the Current and Long-range Planning Divisions teach students about general planning concepts including zoning, land use and development patterns, public participation, planning for future growth, and anticipating future service needs for community. Students are exposed to the interrelationships between differing land uses and learn about land use compatibility. The relationships between transportation and land uses are explored, along with concepts such as reducing vehicular traffic by locating schools near neighborhoods and parks. Comprehensive Planning topics such as locating jobs near housing and other mixed-use concepts are discussed, particularly near future transit stations. Students also learn about the development process; from the initial submittal of a development application to staff to an explanation of City Council’s deliberations. Next, students put their newly learned planning concepts into practice with a hands-on game where students build their own city. The game includes a very large foam board with minimal amenities such as highways, mountains, and rivers and Velcro squares that are scattered all over the board. The students are instructed to think about what they have learned and suggest amenities and buildings to include in their city. The game includes over forty Velcro-affixed pieces which are placed on the game board as suggestions are volunteered. The student placing the game piece is asked to provide a reason for why they placed their building where they did. As the game unfolds, the students learn about the relationships between different land uses and how they affect development patterns. They also learn about preserving open space and mountain views. At the end of the game, students are allowed to change game pieces in response to the development patterns of the city they built, based on feedback from their classmates. Changing the city game pieces allows the students to learn about redevelopment and the reuse of property while recognizing the need for additional services, such as fire and police, as well as the resulting additional need for commercial or residential land uses. Teaching children about planning, growth, and development from a real-world perspective gives them the ability to see the City differently. It helps them recognize the interactions between the built and natural environment.

The overall goal of the program is to foster a greater curiosity and involvement in civic functions. As a result, the City’s population will continually be more educated and can more fully participate in the decision making process. An informed and participatory public is an essential component in promoting civic awareness and appreciation.

**Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the program.**

The most recognizable result of the program is the increased popularity of the program with the various schools in the overall school district. The number of requested City visits by 3rd grade classes has increased steadily since the programs inception.

**Lessons Learned during planning, implementation and analysis of the program.**

Some of the lessons learned over the years of the program include the need to make the presentations fun for the students, to constantly update the presentation materials as the City grows, and challenge the students to take greater interest in how their City functions.