

January 14, 2025

WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Strategic Trails Plan Update.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project team has made considerable progress over the last eight months and the [Strategic Trails Plan](#) (STP) is nearing completion. The plan enters its third and final phase and it's an opportune moment to pause and garner feedback from Council.

Following Council feedback, staff will focus on finalizing the tasks and will develop the draft plan which will be available for public review in late February. After incorporating final comments, the plan will be finalized and shared with Council for consideration in May 2025.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

Does Council have feedback on the following?

1. Guiding principles used to develop the Proposed Trails Map
2. Criteria used to prioritize trail projects
3. Proposed strategy to address trail safety

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The paved trail system is one of the most highly valued community assets in Fort Collins, as indicated in the [2024 Community Survey](#). Over the span of 45 years, the City has expanded the system to 46 miles of trails throughout the City connecting community members from neighborhoods to schools, parks, natural areas, and downtown. Trail planning efforts have been included in several Parks and Recreation plans since the mid-1970's and in 2013, the first standalone trails plan was adopted by Council - the [2013 Paved Recreational Trails Master Plan](#). Additional goals were also identified in the [2021 Parks and Recreation Plan – ReCreate](#).

Beginning in March 2024, an interdepartmental team was formed to update the 2013 trails plan, renamed, the Strategic Trails Plan (STP). Since March, the project team has embarked upon the planning and implementation of a robust community engagement process that has led to the development of the plan's policies and specific deliverables. To help ground the discussion, below is a recap of the plan's overarching purpose and goals:

Plan Purpose

- Provide a framework for the future planning, design, maintenance, funding, and preservation of the paved trail system
- Update framework for planning, design, construction, maintenance, and preservation of the paved trail system
- Create seamless integration of a low-stress network (on and off-street systems) to achieve a 15-Minute City while maintaining the trail system's recreational value
- Ensure priority trail connections are made to underrepresented neighborhoods, schools, parks, and natural areas

Plan Goals

- Assess if the paved trail system meets the needs of community and determine challenges and opportunities for improvement
- Develop shared vision for expansion of paved trail system to meet future needs
- Create transparency to trail planning, design, funding, construction and maintenance
- Explore and develop new policies to improve current and future paved trail system

PROGRESS TO DATE

1. Community Engagement – Phases I & II

The project team hosted or participated in several community engagement activities between the months of May and November 2024 to share plan details and to hear from community members firsthand. Activities ranged from community working group meetings to community-wide events, neighborhood meetings, boards and commission meetings, and a (regional) Northern Colorado Trails Summit.

The project team also launched the second phase of the online [interactive mapping tool](#) to share and receive community feedback on proposed trails. Since Phase I, this interactive tool has enabled community members to interact with one another and to agree or disagree with trail observations and ideas for improvement.

It has proved to be an extremely effective method for reaching hundreds of community members and to also document public input related to the everyday user experiences, including safety concerns, pavement conditions, maintenance needs, user interactions, and suggestions to expand the trail system.

The details of these online and in-person activities are fully captured in the Community Engagement Summary (**Attachment 2**). The input received from Phases I & II activities is summarized in the following key themes:

Phase I (March – May)

- **Trails for all** - Everyone should have access to trail opportunities and the planning and design of trails should account for the great variation in abilities, cultural backgrounds, modes of movement, and diversity of the community.
- **Community Connections** - Priority connections for the community include neighborhoods, schools, parks, natural areas, and linkages to other trails.
- **Interconnected Network** - Trails are a key component of the City's system of facilities for active transportation and recreation and should be considered congruently with those facilities to provide a seamless and safe user experience.

Phase II (May - November)

- **Complement On-Street Infrastructure** - Trails should complement, not replace on-street bicycle infrastructure. In many areas of the city, the existing and proposed on-street infrastructure is low-stress.
- **Balancing Trail Access** - Homeowner concern for loss of privacy if trails are developed within irrigation ditch corridors and very close to homes.
- **New Trails in the Northeast** - Strong support for investment in NE Fort Collins trails and interim facilities while future development processes unfold.
- **Trail Safety Education** - Need for additional trail safety education regarding user behaviors/etiquette.
- **Partnerships Produce Results** - Collaborative trail development in Northern Colorado has resulted in the successful completion of numerous projects that connect Fort Collins to neighboring communities. The City should continue to leverage partnerships for a coordinated approach to network development.

2. Draft Proposed Trails Map

The primary focus of the STP is to analyze the existing trail system, to better understand how the trail system serves the community today, and to re-envision how the trail system will serve the community of tomorrow. The project team used five guiding principles to develop the proposed trails map.

1. **Community Engagement** – The public input gleaned in Phases I & 2 were used to create the foundation of the proposed trails map. Utilizing the on line interactive mapping tool, community members were able to articulate and document current gaps in the trail network and help staff understand where they'd like the trail system to go in the future as part of Phase I. In Phase II, community members were offered the opportunity to react to the proposed trails map generated by staff using comments from Phase I and several guiding principles.
2. **Demand and Growth** - This analysis takes into great consideration areas of the city that are continuing to grow while investigating older parts of the city to determine where trails may be retroactively factored into the built environment.
3. **The 15 Minute City** - The paved trail system should not be considered a panacea for creating safe connections to and from each and every origin and destination, but rather, the system must be

designed to be complementary to the existing and future on-street walking and bicycling systems. The 2022 Active Modes Plan (AMP) envisions, plans and prioritizes hundreds of street projects to make streets more accessible, safe, and comfortable for people walking, biking, and rolling. A key premise of the AMP is to develop a Low (Traffic) Stress Network. By working together, the STP and AMP envision and plan for a seamless integration of the off-street and on-street networks. Further these plans represent integral components to achieve the 15-Minute City, a Council priority, with the goal of prioritized connectivity to schools and underrepresented neighborhoods, thereby ensuring equitable service delivery.

4. **Recreational Experience** - Maintaining and enhancing the recreational value of the paved trail system is germane to the foundation of the paved trail system. The future of the trail system can be designed in a manner that preserves the recreational value by planning a system that provides the following features:
 - Cascading or stacked recreational loops that vary in length.
 - Trail design that emulates the shape of the natural landscape and provides variety.
 - Prioritization of trails to access Parks, Natural Areas, riparian corridors, and open spaces.
5. **Conservation and Resilience** - Trails have significant potential as resilient infrastructure that supports both recreation and conservation, specifically in the following functions:
 - **Environmental Stewardship:** Establishing public trails can formalize beneficial social trails, improving the overall recreation experience while protecting sensitive habitats. The integration of trail construction with environmental restoration projects brings additional benefits; and by aligning trail development with wetland stabilization, and stormwater mitigation efforts, trails can create new opportunities for environmental education and community engagement.
 - **Trails as Resilient Infrastructure:** Trails can be designed to serve multiple purposes, including recreation, active transportation, and climate resilience. By integrating trails into local and regional transportation networks, trails help reduce carbon emissions by encouraging non-motorized travel. Additionally, trails can function as adaptive infrastructure, provide flood protection, add to city's tree canopy to mitigate heat islands, serve as fire breaks, and support stormwater management.

Using these guiding principles and faced with both opportunities and constraints, the project team navigated numerous environmental and physical factors to generate a proposed trails map that is feasible from an implementation standpoint; however, the proposed trails map is extensive and unequivocally ambitious with nearly **71 proposed new miles of trails and 35 proposed grade separated crossings at arterial and collector roadways.**

The proposed trails map represents at least a 25-year planning horizon, although, the proposed trails map should be revisited every 5-7 years as the community grows and priorities shift.

Prioritizing Trail Projects

To prioritize trail projects that best meet the needs of the community, the STP proposes two prioritization models to evaluate existing trails and proposed trails. Existing trails and proposed trails draw different funding sources, and therefore are not always in direct competition with one another for funds. For this reason, two models are proposed to account for the difference in existing versus projected data.

The project prioritization framework will equip staff with a framework for reconsidering priorities each year as the City develops its offers for the bi-annual Budgeting for Outcomes process. The framework will also help community members understand the anticipated build out of the trail system.

Prioritization can change in response to new funding sources, opportunities, constraints, and community preferences. Therefore, prioritization can and should be re-evaluated at regular intervals as needs and opportunities shift. Several criteria were considered as sourced from the several city plans and other peer cities. The following sets of criteria are proposed for each model.

Existing Trails Prioritization Criteria (Maintenance and Improvements):

- ***Deferred Asset Maintenance***
 - The STP Asset Assessment Geodatabase, identifies trail sections that pertain to Access Control needs, ADA Deficiency, Crossing Deficiency, Drainage/Flooding, Erosion, Lack of Lighting, Narrow Tread/Insufficient shoulder, Pavement Deficiency, Sharp Turns & Blind Spots, Other). Improves individual safety and safety among user interactions.
- ***Equitable Service Delivery***
 - Trails that enter or are near the 15-min City Analysis identified Equity Focus Areas (EFAs) which have been cross referenced with city's Economic Opportunities Area (EOA) map.
- ***Quantitative Level of Service (LOS)***
 - A quantitative LOS score was calculated for major existing paved travels that evaluated trail width, surface type, grade changes, and user volumes.

Proposed Trails Prioritization Criteria:

- ***Equitable Service Delivery***
 - Proposed trails that enter or are near the 15-min City Analysis identified Equity Focus Areas (EFAs) which have been cross referenced with city's Economic Opportunities Area (EOA) map.
- ***Connectivity to Schools & Neighborhoods***
 - Closes gaps and/or connects schools and neighborhoods
- ***Recreational Value***
 - Closes gaps, completes loops, or connects to Parks or Natural Areas
- ***Demand and Growth***
 - Located in growth areas in alignment with current BFO proposals OR in areas of active and/or anticipated future development review projects
- ***Completes a Gap***
 - Completes a strategic segment of trail to connect two or more trails.

From an operational perspective, each discrete project will also be cross referenced with other future related or adjacent projects and developments to ensure synergy & ease of Implementation. If the city is able to leverage a project in terms of additional resources, or if the project is considered "low-hanging fruit," these factors may influence a shift in the project's ranking.

Grade Separated Crossings

In 2018, an interdepartmental city team prepared the [Bicycle and Pedestrian Grade Separated Crossing Prioritization Study](#). This prioritization study established an approach to prioritize candidate bicycle and pedestrian grade separation locations to direct future investment toward locations that need it most using an approach of both data and engineering judgement. The study has remained in draft form and has been a helpful tool primarily for staff to reference future projects.

As part of the STP, the prioritization study is being updated to remove projects that have been completed and include newly identified projects through the STP planning process. Using the original prioritization criteria, the new list will be reprioritized and cross referenced against the 15 Minute City Analysis to ensure conformity.

The design and construction of grade separated crossings have historically been implemented through a partnership between Park Planning & Development and the City's Engineering Department. Engineering typically leads these major projects and applies for state and federal transportation grants through the North Front Range Metropolitan Organization to help co-fund the projects.

In 2024, the City's Engineering Department developed the 10-Year Transportation Capital Improvement (TCI). TCI is a tool that prioritizes the City's various transportation infrastructure investments using criteria aligning with the City's strategic goals and objectives. Of the 35 identified proposed grade separated crossings at arterial and collector roadways, the top ranked (10-15) grade separated crossing projects identified in the updated Bicycle and Pedestrian Grade Separated Crossing Prioritization Study will be included in the TCI for capital project prioritization and future construction.

Trail Funding Summary

Funding for trail planning, design, and construction is primarily obtained from Conservation Trust Funds (CTF) and Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), which are beneficiaries of Colorado Lottery proceeds.

CTF is constitutionally mandated to be distributed directly to local governments, based on population, for acquiring, developing, and maintaining parks, open space, and recreational facilities, such as trails. The funds are distributed and monitored through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The City of Fort Collins receives approximately 2.4 million dollars annually to fund trail planning, design, and construction, as well as partial maintenance of the trail system. Occasionally, CTF funds are also used to augment other Parks' projects.

The city may also apply for GOCO grants to provide supplemental funding for discreet recreational-based projects. A recent example of a successful GOCO grant is the Poudre River Trail project. The recent trail connections were made possible thanks to a \$2 million Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Connect Initiative Program grant, awarded in 2019 to Larimer County in partnership with the City of Fort Collins and the Towns of Windsor and Timnath.

The Parks Department will also coordinate with Transportation Engineering and Planning (FC Moves) to apply for state and federal funding to plan, design, and construct joint projects, primarily grade separated crossings (over and underpasses). The city's Transportation Capital Expansion Fee (TCEF) is also a partial funding mechanism to design and construct grade separated crossings. Current examples of this partnership include the future Siphon Overpass and Harmony Underpass projects.

The current Community Capital Improvement Program (CCIP) ¼ cent tax funds have historically contributed to the design and construction of grade separated crossings and could potentially contribute to also fund trail projects in the future.

The current Community Capital Improvement Program (CCIP) tax will expire on December 31, 2025. Staff is currently working to [create a package](#) to offer voters as a renewal in November 2025 for a tax that would run from January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2035. The STP is currently linked to two potential projects:

- **Strategic Trails Implementation: \$10M (tentative)** - The **Strategic Trail Plan** will be completed in early 2025. Additional annual funding will support the current Conservation Trust funding and expedite project delivery as developed by the plan. This potential funding mechanism would bolster current trail funding by approximately 40%.

- **Bicycle Infrastructure and Overpass/Underpass Program: \$20M (tentative)** - This program provides an annual fund to construct bicycle infrastructure as recommended in the Active Modes Plan (AMP). This fund will combine the previous CCIP Bicycle Infrastructure Improvements and CCIP Bike/Ped Grade Separated Crossing Funds so will also fund pedestrian over/underpass projects that align with the AMP and the **Strategic Trails Plan**, as well as aligns with our Vision Zero action plan.

Lastly, the City has historically capitalized on the opportunity to partner with land developers to dedicate public access easements and to share the cost to design and construct trail infrastructure. This coordination is closely tied to sharing the vision of the STP in areas of the city that are still growing, such as Northeast Fort Collins and other infill and redevelopment projects.

3. Addressing Trail Safety

Over the course of 2024, an emerging theme surfaced through STP community engagement activities at city events, boards commission meetings, and correspondence with community members and Council - a need to more thoroughly address mobility safety on the paved trail system.

The issue primarily involves the speed and types of bikes, including e-bikes, that are being operated on the trail system. The speed differentials between people walking and people biking can be great and in many reported close call incidents, people moving more slowly on the trail system feel intimidated and are concerned they will be struck by a faster moving bicyclist. There's also concern for people operating devices that are outside of the State of Colorado's e-bike classification. These devices are considered "out of class" by the People for Bikes organization and can reach speeds higher than Class 1 & 2 e-bikes.

While crashes resulting in severe injury are rare on the trail system, they do occur. There is a public perception that our city is lacking in terms of providing a safe environment for people to use a diversity of mobility options on our trails and that additional safety education efforts are needed so people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds feel safe and welcome using the trails. The need to instill a culture of safety and courtesy on our trails is paramount.

Related to the STP process and trail safety, Park Planning & Development staff are coordinating with FC Moves on a 'Which Wheels Go Where?' project to explore the use of human and lightweight electric powered devices on city facilities, such as, sidewalks, streets, bike lanes, and trails. This project is moving forward concurrently to the STP process and is scheduled to seek Council feedback in May 2025.

Trail Safety Strategy

To address trail safety issues, staff is currently exploring a four-point approach that will require coordination between several departments including, Parks, Natural Areas, FC Moves, Communication and Public Information Office, and the Fort Collins Police Department. Implementation of this strategy will begin in 2025.

1. **Trail Safety Education Campaign** – Develop a contemporary and evergreen multimedia safety education campaign that addresses common safety concerns and provides on-going safety education messaging and resources, including information and guidance specific to the types of allowed e-bikes, allowed speeds, and consumer education.
2. **Courtesy and Etiquette Signs** - Use existing sign design or develop new design and install more frequently along the trail system reflecting key safety messages of multimedia campaign.
3. **Warning Signs and Striping Improvements** - Create consistency and refresh centerline striping and install warning signs at bridges, underpasses, and trail junctions.
4. **Bicycle Ambassador Program** - Continue coordination with FC Moves to include path patrols and routine trail pop-up events to provide trail user safety education.

Enforcement Considerations

There's often a sense that enforcement will solve the safety concerns on our trails however, there are considerable challenges with enforcement for it to be an effective tactic in changing trail user behavior, particularly in the long-term.

The existing 45 miles of the paved trail system is patrolled by a small team of rangers from both the Parks and Natural Areas Departments. Rangers have some enforcement limitations as they are not allowed to detain or pursue scofflaws. Rangers have the authority to issue citations for municipal code offenses; however, they often choose to educate people instead.

One method of educating community members involves employing a technique called, '*Authority of the Resource.*' This method transfers the authority (or that which asks a person to think or behave in a certain way) from the ranger to those areas (trails, parks, and natural resources) that have their own requirements. The technique asks the ranger to subtly deemphasize the regulation and transfer part of the expectation back to the community member by interpreting the area's requirements.

Fort Collins Police Services (FCPS) shares a similar position with respect to trail safety and enforcement. They are faced with a multitude of enforcement issues city-wide. Enforcement is at the discretion of the officer, and they typically focus enforcement on issues that have the greater threat to public safety. Spending considerable time on the trail system is not an effective use of their time; however, if an emergency is reported, both FCPS and the rangers will respond. Parks, Natural Areas, and Police Services recognize there is a trail safety issue; however, they believe the best course of action is to continue addressing safety through education and outreach, rather than enforcement.

4. Additional Completed Deliverables

The STP focus areas address existing and new challenges and opportunities associated with growing and preserving the paved trail system. The second phase of the STP process included multiple analyses, resulting in key reports and project deliverables that will directly inform recommendations of the plan.

- **Plan Congruence:** Ensuring STP alignment with related City plans is an important guiding principle of the planning process. The Plan Congruence task included extensive review of existing local and regional plans, maps, and policy initiatives with implications for paved trail planning in Fort Collins. This effort included identifying the specific policies, objectives, and recommendations from related plans that align with or are closely related to the STP Focus Areas, themes, and Council Priorities. This tool is intended to serve as helpful framework for identifying trail projects that support the goals of multiple City plans and departments.
- **Safety, Mobility, and Accessibility:** This task involves the review of current safety outreach practices and ordinances; and provide recommendations to create a culture of safety among users of the trail system. This focus area of the plan includes the trail safety education strategies previously discussed. Additional analyses include the following components:
 - **Quantitative Level of Service Analysis.** This analysis calculated a quantitative Level of Service (LOS) score for major existing paved travels that evaluated each trail according to width, surface type, grade changes, and user volumes. This evaluation identified existing trails in the greatest need of improvements relative to the volume of users served, mode split (type of trail user), and quality of the existing facilities. Roughly two-thirds of existing paved trails already provide a Grade-A level of service. Of the trails studied, the Spring Creek trail performs the poorest, with five miles of C- and D-graded trail segments
 - **At-Grade Trail Crossings Crash History Analysis.** Pedestrian and bicycle crashes reveal potential traffic safety improvements that could be included at select locations. Crash data

trends at the transition zones from on-street to off-street trail network were analyzed for eleven years of crash data (2012 through 2023).

- **Asset Management:** A maintenance audit was conducted of existing major paved trails to document observed deficiencies, pavement conditions, known user conflicts, barriers to access, and other known issues with geo-tagged waypoints. The resulting STP Asset Assessment Geodatabase was used to create an online, interactive mapping tool for trail maintenance staff to review, track, and prioritize trail improvements and upgrades.
- **Irrigation Ditch/Trail Compatibility:** The purpose of this task is to evaluate the feasibility of pairing trails on, along, or across irrigation ditches; and to enhance public transparency to known challenges and explore opportunities for future collaboration with irrigation ditch companies. This study resulted in the production of four tools to help guide future implementation of trails along or across irrigation ditches within Fort Collins Growth Management Area: 1) Irrigation Ditch Company Evaluation Matrix; 2) Irrigation Ditch Viability Map; 3) Case Studies; 4) Consolidated GIS Shapefile of all Ditches within the Growth Management Area (GMA).

Deliverables Under Development

- **Development Review:** The project team conducted a thorough review of the City's Land Use Code as it relates to trail development requirements to identify amendments that may be necessary to optimize the code for future trail development by clarifying authority, definitions and terminology.
- **Design and Construction Standards:** Review and update existing design standards to ensure that new trail facilities can meet the needs of a growing population of trail users. These recommendations will define trail typologies, design specifications for new construction, grade separated crossing standards, at-grade crossing standards, and centerline standards.
- **Project Prioritization and Implementation Scenarios** – Utilizing the criteria described above, the project team will run a model to inform the future build out of the paved trail system. These scenarios will explore the rates of project construction and build out of the trail system based on current and potential future funding.

NEXT STEPS

Following the incorporation of feedback received from Council, staff will focus on finalizing the tasks described above as the fundamental building blocks of the plan recommendations.

Development of the draft plan will take place through February 2025 with a draft plan ready for public review in late February. Draft plan presentations and input sessions to city boards and commissions will take place concurrent to public review. After incorporating final comments, the plan will be finalized and shared with Council for anticipated adoption in May 2025.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Proposed Trails Map
2. Community Engagement Summary
3. Presentation