

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

Delynn Coldiron, City Clerk
Carrie Daggett, City Attorney

SUBJECT

Items Relating to a Citizen-Initiated Petition Relating to the Hughes Stadium Property.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item, pursuant to the requirements of the City Charter when presented with an initiative petition certified as sufficient by the City Clerk, is to either:

1. Adopt the proposed ordinance without alteration within 25 business days; or
2. Submit the proposed measure to the registered electors of the City.

A. First Reading of Ordinance No. 126, 2025, Adopting a Citizen-Initiated Ordinance Regarding Preserving and Establishing the Use for the Entire Former Hughes Stadium Property as a Natural Area. (**Option 1**);

OR

B. Resolution 2025-073 Submitting a Citizen-Initiated Ordinance Requiring that the Former Hughes Stadium Property be Used 100% as a City Natural Area to a Vote of the Registered Electors of the City at the Regular Municipal Election on November 4, 2025. (**Option 2**)

If Council does not adopt the Ordinance, a protest hearing regarding the ballot title may be required before consideration of the Resolution. Under Section 7-156 of the City Code, any registered elector desiring to protest a proposed ballot title or submission clause for any initiated measure must file such a protest with the City Clerk, no later than noon on Monday, July 14, 2025. If a protest is filed, a hearing on the protest will be added to the agenda item and must take place before the Council adopts the Resolution setting the ballot title and submission clause

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The City Clerk's Office received an initiative petition on June 10, 2025, which the City Clerk has determined to contain a sufficient number of signatures to place the initiated measure before the registered electors of the City at the November 4, 2025, regular election. The petition met the requirement that it be signed by a number of registered electors of the city equal to at least ten percent (10%) of the total ballots cast in the last regular City election, which is 5,070. It was determined that the petition contained 6,301 valid signatures and the City Clerk certified the petition as sufficient on June 25, 2025. No protests were filed.

Upon certification, the City Clerk is required to present the certified petition to the Council at its next regularly scheduled meeting or at a special meeting called for that purpose. Pursuant to the City Charter, when the City Clerk presents a sufficient initiative petition, Council must either:

1. Adopt the proposed ordinance without alteration within twenty-five (25) business days (Option 1); or
2. Submit such proposed measure, in the form petitioned for, to the registered electors of the City (Option 2).

Ordinance No. 126, 2025, is presented to Council without alteration for its consideration for adoption on first reading. If the Council chooses not to adopt the Ordinance, Council must submit the proposed measure to the voters at the next regular election. Resolution 2025-073 would submit the measure and establish the ballot language.

The purpose of the initiated ordinance, as described in the petitioners' General Statement of Purpose shown on their Notice of Intent is to preserve and establish the use for the entire former Hughes Stadium property as a Natural Area as defined in the Fort Collins municipal code. The text of the proposed ordinance is as follows:

WHEREAS, a citizen-initiated ballot initiative ("ballot initiative") related to the future of the former Hughes Stadium property appeared on the April 6, 2021 City of Fort Collins municipal election ballot; and

WHEREAS, the ballot initiative required the City of Fort Collins ("the City") to rezone the former Hughes Stadium property as a Public Open Land, acquire the property, and use it for "parks, recreation and open lands, natural areas, and wildlife rescue and education"; and

WHEREAS, the ballot initiative was approved by 68.61% of the Fort Collins citizens who voted in the April 6, 2021 election; and

WHEREAS, Article X, Section 1 of the Fort Collins charter reserves the right of registered electors of the City "to propose ordinances or resolutions to the Council, and if the Council fails to adopt a measure so proposed, to adopt or reject such ordinance or resolution at the polls," with any voter-approved initiative having the same legal effect as an ordinance or resolution adopted by the City Council; and

WHEREAS, following the passage of the ballot initiative, the City rezoned the former Hughes Stadium property as a Public Open Land and acquired the former Hughes Stadium property, as directed by the voters; and

WHEREAS, since the passage of the ballot initiative and subsequent purchase of the former Hughes Stadium property, public discussions and stakeholder processes have occurred regarding the specific allowable future uses of the former Hughes Stadium property; and

WHEREAS, some residents and elected officials have expressed confusion about the ballot initiative's intent related to the future uses of the former Hughes Stadium property during those discussions and stakeholder processes; and

WHEREAS, the City has not yet decided what future uses to allow on the former Hughes Stadium property; and

WHEREAS, the intent of the 2021 ballot initiative was to conserve the former Hughes Stadium property in public trust; and that the entire Hughes property would be and remain in perpetuity a publicly-owned, operated and maintained protected open space used for low-impact recreational activities consistent with the uses allowed in a Natural Area; and

WHEREAS, the 2021 ballot initiative further intended that the former Hughes Stadium property be conserved for ecological restoration and the integrity of its wildlife habitat consistent with the rules of a Natural Area; and

WHEREAS, the most appropriate way to reflect the intent of the 2021 ballot initiative as codified in subsequent City ordinances and resolutions is to designate and use the entire former Hughes Stadium property as a Natural Area as defined and governed by Article IX, Chapter 23 of the Fort Collins municipal code; and

WHEREAS, Fort Collins has preserved over 40,000 acres of Natural Areas since 1973; and

WHEREAS, Natural Areas help make Fort Collins a highly desirable place to live, work, and visit; and

WHEREAS, the former Hughes Stadium property occupies land in between and in close proximity to the current Maxwell and Pineridge Natural Areas, creating a contiguous area of unique ecological value; and

WHEREAS, Fort Collins residents have repeatedly affirmed the importance of preserving ecological integrity, connecting people to nature, and conserving Natural Areas by the City, including but not limited to a 2020 City survey of its residents that indicated Natural Areas, wildlife habitat, and hiking trails were their most important outdoor priorities; and

WHEREAS, Fort Collins residents currently use existing Natural Areas to enjoy the low-impact recreation opportunities Natural Areas provide, such as walking, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, bird watching, and fishing; the educational opportunities and programs provided to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds; the beautiful landscapes and views they provide; and the importance of Natural Areas to North American indigenous peoples' ceremonies and cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS, the City values sustainability in policies, plans, strategies and projects that align with its Triple Bottom Line decision-making philosophy of social, economic and environmental well-being to meet its residents' present needs and the needs of future generations without compromising the ecosystems upon which we all depend; and

WHEREAS, the preservation and use of the former Hughes Stadium property as a Natural Area would provide an invaluable social, economic, and environmental resource for current and future generations of Fort Collins residents.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. That the City hereby makes and adopts the determinations and findings contained in the recitals set forth above.

Section 2. That the voter-approved Hughes Stadium Property ballot initiative language, as reflected in the City of Fort Collins Resolution 2021-024 and the “Proposed Citizen Initiated Ordinance” on the April 6, 2021 regular municipal election ballot, shall be modified to clarify that the entire former Hughes Stadium property be used only as a Natural Area as defined by and subject to the rules of Article IX, Chapter 23 of the Fort Collins municipal code.

Section 3. That the Hughes Stadium property ballot initiative language, as adopted by Fort Collins voters during the April 6, 2021 election, shall be amended as follows:

That the City shall acquire the Hughes Stadium property, a 164.56-acre parcel of land legally described in Section 3 of Fort Collins Ordinance No. 123 (2018) (“Annexing the Property Known as the Hughes Stadium Property Annexation to the City of Fort Collins, Colorado”) at its fair market value for the purpose of using it for ~~parks, recreation and open lands, natural areas, and wildlife rescue and education.~~ A NATURAL AREA.

Section 4. That the City of Fort Collins shall make necessary conforming amendments to its land use regulations, municipal code, previously enacted council resolutions and ordinances, and any other relevant documents to reflect the aforementioned clarification.

Section 5. That this ballot initiative shall take effect immediately upon passage by the majority of the voters of Fort Collins during the first available regular municipal election and apply to the Hughes Stadium property ballot initiative approved by voters on April 6, 2021.

Section 6. Any registered voter in Fort Collins has legal standing to petition for injunctive and/or declaratory relief related to City noncompliance with the provisions of this ballot initiative.

Resolution 2025-073 also adopts the ballot title and submission clause for the measure. Under Article X, Section 10(b) of the City Charter, the ballot title shall contain information identifying the measure as a city-initiated or citizen-initiated measure. The submission clause shall be brief, shall not conflict with the submission clause for any petition previously filed for the same election, and shall unambiguously state the principle and provision. Both the title and submission clause are printed on the ballot, along with the words “Yes/For” and “No/Against”.

Under Section 7-156 of the City Code, any registered elector desiring to protest a proposed ballot title or submission clause for any initiated measure must file such a protest with the City Clerk, no later than noon on Monday, July 14, 2025. If a protest is filed, a hearing on the protest will be added to the agenda item and must take place before the Council adopts the Resolution setting the ballot title and submission clause.

CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS

None. The item adds no election-related costs since this is a regular election for the City.

BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

None.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

None.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Certification of Sufficient Petition
2. Presentation
3. Ordinance No. 126, 2025
4. Resolution 2025-073