

## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



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### STAFF

Kelly Smith, Senior Planner, Natural Areas  
Julia Feder, Conservation & Stewardship Planning Manager, Natural Areas  
Katie Donahue, Director, Natural Areas

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### SUBJECT

**First Reading of Ordinance No. 124, 2025, Adopting the 2025 Natural Areas Strategic Framework as an Element of City Plan and as an Update to the 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan.**

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to adopt the 2025 Natural Areas Strategic Framework, attached as Exhibit A to the Ordinance, which updates the City's 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan and serves as a systemwide guide for the planning and management of the Natural Areas Department (NAD) over the coming decade. Rooted in ballot language, extensive community engagement, and broader City policies, the Framework articulates an updated vision, set of values, and strategic goals for the Department. It provides the foundation for action-oriented planning that will be implemented through zone-level management planning. Adoption of the Framework constitutes an amendment to City Plan under its provisions for incorporating new elements into the City's comprehensive plan.

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### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the Ordinance on First Reading.

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### BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

The Natural Areas Strategic Framework provides grounding direction for NAD's Conservation and Stewardship Planning (CSP) process and serves as an update to the 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan. CSP guides the management of Natural Areas properties to protect habitat and scenic values, while supporting public access for the community. CSP is rooted in the language of the City of Fort Collins Open Space Yes! and Larimer County's Help Preserve Open Space tax initiatives that fund most of the Natural Areas' efforts. These ballots, alongside previous department master plans and citywide plans and priorities, informed the development of CSP's elements.

Adoption of this Ordinance meets the criteria for City Plan amendments. Specifically, the existing City Plan is in need of this update to reflect current values, land use patterns, and stewardship practices. Adoption of the Strategic Framework promotes the public welfare and is consistent with the vision, goals, principles, and policies of City Plan and its related elements, including the City's environmental stewardship, equity, and sustainability goals.

## ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Natural Areas planning occurs at two levels: systemwide and across management zones. The Strategic Framework is the systemwide plan that provides structure for other Natural Areas' planning efforts. The Strategic Framework will be updated every ten years and adopted by Council.

The Strategic Framework sets the foundation of a vision, values, and goals that will support action-based management zone planning. Natural Areas organizes its work into six geographic management zones that are defined by ecosystem type. Management zones are adaptively managed through annual check-ins, and a comprehensive zone plan update every seven years. Zone plans are administratively adopted by the Natural Areas Director. The ongoing nature of zone-based planning and the ten-year cycle to update the Strategic Plan create a consistent cadence to gather targeted community input, highlight the unique character of each zone, and identify management actions that inform work planning and budgeting.

The Strategic Framework aligns with broader City values and priorities and integrates input gathered through robust public outreach. It reflects the community's continued commitment to land conservation, ecological health, and equitable access to nature.

## VISION, VALUES AND GOALS

The Strategic Framework introduces a refreshed vision, a set of Department values, and updated goals that map closely to community priorities and City strategic policies. The vision, values, and goals reflect City values and plans, while remaining rooted in the language of the department's two funding measures.

	Role	Strategic Framework
Vision	The Vision provides inspiration to ground and motivate future actions. It describes the ideal state towards which the Department works	Thriving Ecosystems for a Greater Fort Collins Community
Values	Values reflect the City's organizational values while highlighting the Department's distinct focus on ecological protection and management. These values play an important role in the Department's planning and prioritization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ecological Function</li><li>• Resource Protection</li><li>• Connectivity</li><li>• Integrity</li><li>• Safety &amp; Wellbeing</li><li>• Belonging</li><li>• Service</li><li>• Partnership</li></ul>
Goals	Goals describe the major areas of work for the Department in the coming decade.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Conserve and Protect Land &amp; Water</li><li>2. Strengthen Habitats &amp; Ecological Resilience</li><li>3. Support Access to Nature</li><li>4. Foster Community Connections &amp; Stewardship</li></ol>

The Strategic Framework carries forward and reaffirms NAD's mission, "To conserve and enhance lands with natural resource, agricultural, and scenic values, while providing meaningful education and appropriate recreation opportunities."

## **CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS**

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None.

## **BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

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The Land Conservation and Stewardship Board, Natural Resources Advisory Board, and the Water Commission all recommend adoption of the Strategic Framework. See attachments for recommendations. Staff is scheduled to present the plan to the Planning and Zoning Commission at the July 11, 2025, Work Session and will seek a recommendation at their formal hearing on July 17, 2025, ahead of Second Reading by Council on August 19, 2025.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

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Public engagement set the foundation for this planning effort, with extensive outreach to community members, partners, City boards and commissions, and Council. Engagement occurred in two phases. Phase 1 sought to gather input that informed the concepts and themes of the plan. Phase 2 provided an opportunity for the community to relay feedback on a draft plan.

### **PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT**

Initial engagement involved nearly 5,000 community touchpoints and provided valuable insights that strongly supported the department's conservation mission, a commitment to adaptive and responsible land management, and a deep community desire to stay connected with nature. In addition to general information sharing, engagement methods included:

- Memos to and a Council Work Session
- Land Conservation and Stewardship Board (LCSB) member and ballot writer interviews, along with multiple discussion items on LCSB meeting agendas
- Discussion items at multiple advisory board and Super Issues Board and Commissions meeting
- Small group discussions with historically underrepresented groups and partner organizations
- Interactive discussions with a Technical Advisory Committee representing diverse perspectives
- Online questionnaires
- Interactive tabling at community events and natural area trailheads

### **PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT**

Engagement with the draft Strategic Framework provided an opportunity for the community to share feedback on the plan. In addition to broadly engaging the public with the draft plan, targeted outreach to community members who previously participated in the Strategic Framework process were asked whether the plan reflects their priorities. Overall, the community expressed strong support for the draft Strategic Framework, describing it as comprehensive, engaging, and aligned with the community's priorities and vision. Feedback themes included:

- Continuing to protect land, water, and habitats, along with stewardship of these resources
- Taking a holistic approach to managing natural areas by balancing conservation, access, and community involvement

- Enhancing educational programming and communication
- Leveraging partnerships to amplify the impact of NAD's work

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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1. Land Conservation and Stewardship Board Minutes, May 14, 2025 (excerpt)
2. Water Commission Minutes, May 15, 2025 (excerpt)
3. Natural Resources Advisory Board Letter of Support, May 21, 2025
4. Planning and Zoning Commission Recommendation (forthcoming)
5. Council Work Session Summary, October 22, 2024
6. Ordinance No. 124, 2025