



WORK SESSION AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council

STAFF

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SUBJECT FOR DISCUSSION

Future Considerations for the Former Hughes Property.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to review previous activity regarding the Hughes property, provide findings from recent outreach, and discuss potential and desired next steps as the City gets closer to acquisition of the property.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. What initial thoughts does Council have regarding feedback to date?
2. Are there activities Council would like to continue to explore on the site?
3. Does Council support staff bringing 2-3 options that could include both short-term and long-term opportunities for discussion later in 2023?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

In 2021, a citizen-initiated ballot initiative passed, requiring the City to purchase the former Hughes Stadium property, rezone the 164.56 acre parcel to Public Open Lands District (POL) and use the site for “parks, recreation, and open lands, natural areas, and wildlife rescue and restoration.” Since the fall of 2022, staff has been working with a consultant to conduct public outreach regarding the future of the former Hughes Stadium site. Following is some background information regarding the site, engagement previously conducted, results of the most recent outreach effort and possible next steps in the process.

Project History

The original Hughes Stadium was built in the 1950s and opened in 1958. To build the stadium, the entire site was re-graded to create large parking lots that accommodated thousands of visitors during football games and other events. The site remained open to pedestrians and a disc golf course was later built in the southeast corner of the site where a large, regional stormwater detention pond is located.

In 2016, CSU closed Hughes Stadium as plans for an on campus stadium moved forward.

In 2017 CSU submitted a Request for Qualifications and later a Request for Proposals (RFP) toward future development of the site for housing.

The property was annexed into the City from Larimer County and was zoned “Transition (T) District” in anticipation of a future process to rezone the site for other uses.

In 2019, a development plan was submitted to the City and staff began the process of conducting community meetings to gather input regarding the future of the site. A regular Council meeting was held on November 5, 2019. Engagement feedback and materials were included in the Council packet for the November 5 regular meeting. On first reading, property was rezoned to allow residential uses on a split vote. After multiple postponements, the ordinance failed on second reading in May 2020.

In response to the potential development, residents began organizing a campaign to rezone the property to “Public Open Lands (POL.)” The initiative was put on the ballot for voters in April of 2021 and was passed.

Ballot language (April 6, 2021): “Shall the City enact an ordinance requiring the City Council of the City of Fort Collins to immediately rezone upon passage of the ordinance a 164.56-acre parcel of real property formerly home to the Hughes Stadium from the Transition District to the Public Open Lands District, and requiring the City to acquire the property at fair market value to use said property for parks, recreation, and open lands, natural areas, and wildlife rescue and restoration, and further prohibiting the City from de-annexing, ceasing acquisition efforts or subsequently rezoning the property without voter approval of a separate initiative referred to the voters by City Council, and granting legal standing to any registered elector in the City to seek injunctive and/or declaratory relief in the courts related to City noncompliance with said ordinance?”

In 2022, City staff began the process of acquiring the property. In late 2022, in anticipation of acquisition, staff began the outreach process to engage community members in potential future activities on the site. staff engaged Kearns & West, a third-party consulting firm specializing in public engagement efforts.

Engagement Process

- Previous Engagement
 - Public Meeting information
 - Parks & Recreation Masterplan Survey
- Groups and Individuals engaged:
 - Recreation
 - Wildlife Rescue
 - Conservation
 - PATHS
 - Boards & Commissions
 - Native American/Indigenous Groups
- Surveys:
 - #1- based on ballot language
 - #2- based on impact/activity level
- Focus Groups

Throughout this process it remained clear that this site is a highly valued, cherished piece of property, and it is a relatively large parcel of land with countless opportunities. General consensus regarding preserving views of the foothills emerged as did recognition that a community space for recreation and nature is needed.

Staff and consultants also realize that the available surveys became a mechanism for residents to mobilize their interests.

These interests range from making the entire property a Natural Area to support for a bike park. In between these stated desires were numerous possibilities including restoring native grassland habitat, creating an accessible and balanced space, the addition of a few amenities such as a basic restroom, signage, and more parking, and a need for more shade and seating areas.

Staff made a basic attempt at grouping activities presented as low, medium, or high impact based on infrastructure required, estimated use, parking required, sound levels, etc.

It is important to note that engagement with Native American/Indigenous groups is just beginning and discussions regarding Hughes have been very preliminary. This is based on staff utilizing culturally appropriate facilitation and the early relationship building occurring with our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office.

See attached engagement report for full details.

Current State

Since 2019, and throughout the negotiations for acquisition, the Hughes site has seen little to no improvements or management. The disc golf course sees continued use and the sledding hill is utilized when conditions allow. The City worked closely with Colorado State University when residents self-hosted gatherings.

Neither the City General Fund budget nor the Natural Areas budget planned for costs associated with the Hughes property. Acquisition is estimated to cost \$12.5M with \$2M each from General Fund and Natural Areas and the difference coming from bonding. Final costs will be allocated proportionally and retroactively to corresponding funds once land uses are determined.

NEXT STEPS

The City anticipates executing the contract for acquisition of Hughes this month and completing the purchase in July. Currently, there are no plans or dedicated funding/budget offers for improvements or activity on the site and there are not any anticipated changes in the near term. Currently the Parks Department manages the disc golf course including trash pick-up in a few locations.

Staff is proposing continuing to work with Council and the public to determine potential activities or improvements to pursue in future budget cycles. This will likely be a multi-year iterative process. Council will approve a 2025-26 budget in November 2024.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Kearns and West Hughes Engagement Report
2. Minutes from Boards & Commissions
3. Presentation