



## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council

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### STAFF

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Katie Donahue, Natural Areas Director  
Julia Feder, Environmental Program Manager  
Alynn Karnes, Land Conservation Specialist  
Tawnya Ernst, Senior Real Estate Specialist  
Ingrid Decker, Legal

### SUBJECT

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**Resolution 2022-112 Authorizing the Mayor to Execute an Intergovernmental Agreement with Larimer County and the City of Loveland to Partner in the Purchase of Fee and Conservation Easement Interests on a 1,547-acre Property in the Blue Mountain Conservation Priority Area.**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The purpose of this item is to seek authorization to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Larimer County and the City of Loveland for the Heaven's Door Conservation Project. The project will conserve 1,547 acres in fee adjacent to the Big Thompson Canyon.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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Staff recommends adoption of the Resolution.

### BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

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Larimer County (County) is under contract to purchase the 1,547-acre Heaven's Door Ranch with an anticipated closing date of November 30, 2022. The project was identified as a high priority for conservation within the County's Blue Mountain Conservation Priority Area and County Open Lands staff have been working with the landowner towards protecting the Ranch for more than two decades.

The City of Fort Collins (City), City of Loveland (Loveland) and Larimer County Open Lands have a long history of collaboration to conserve land throughout Larimer County to meet shared land conservation goals. This collaboration includes funding partnerships on various open space and conservation easement acquisitions. This acquisition will protect important values that confer the following public benefits:

- Significant, intact wildlife habitat including foothills grasslands, shrublands and lower montane forest with numerous natural seeps and springs.
- Buffers to conserved lands: the Ranch is adjacent to a matrix of existing conserved lands including Sylvan Dale Ranch conservation easements, USFS, and Colorado State Land Board.
- Iconic scenic vistas: the Ranch encompasses the broad scenic valley, hogbacks and forested hillsides that comprise the southern backdrop at the mouth of the Big Thompson Canyon along US Highway 34.

- Future public nature-based recreation opportunities: the site's location is within 5 miles of the City of Loveland and near other Front Range communities.

The proposed agreement between the City, Loveland and the County authorizes the City to contribute funding towards the County's acquisition of Heaven's Door Ranch. Loveland will also contribute towards the total purchase price in exchange for the County granting a conservation easement on the Ranch to be co-held by the City and Loveland.

The project addresses key criteria noted in the Land Acquisition Partnership Guidelines:

- The project aligns with the goals of the Council-adopted 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan for regional conservation and partnerships.
- Larimer County, Loveland and the City have a positive track record of partnerships.
- The proposed partnership enhances landscape scale conservation efforts in the City's Buckhorn Conservation Area and the County's Blue Mountain Conservation Area.

The County, at its sole discretion, will have the option to divest itself of approximately 150 acres of the southeast corner of the Ranch property.

### **CITY FINANCIAL IMPACTS**

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The total cost to acquire the Ranch is estimated to be \$9,029,850. This total includes the purchase price of the fee acquisition as well as the due diligence and closing costs associated with both the fee acquisition and conservation easement conveyance. The County will contribute approximately \$7,779,850 to the total cost. The City will contribute \$750,000 and Loveland will contribute \$500,000 toward the acquisition cost.

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

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At its October 12, 2022, meeting, the Land Conservation and Stewardship Board voted unanimously to recommend that Council approve the IGA with Larimer County and Loveland to partner on the purchase of the Heaven's Door Ranch property.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

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Not applicable.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

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1. Resolution for Consideration
2. Resolution Exhibit A
3. Vicinity Map
4. Site Map
5. Natural Areas Administrative Policy-Land Acquisition Partnership Guidelines
6. Land Conservation and Stewardship Board Minutes, October 12, 2022