

MINUTES

CITY OF FORT COLLINS • BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS



Land Conservation & Stewardship Board

January 14, 2026

Regular Meeting – Excerpt

Members:

Ross Cunniff, Chair
Scott Mason, Vice Chair
Denise Culver, Member
Jennifer Gooden, Member
Steve Joyce, Member

Holger Kley, Member
Elena Lopez, Member
Mark Sears, Member
Tom Shoemaker, Member

1. CALL TO ORDER: Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm.

2. ROLL CALL:

LCSB: Scott Mason, Denise Culver, Steve Joyce, Holger Kley, Jennifer Gooden, Ross Cunniff, Tom Shoemaker, Elena Lopez

LCSB Absent: Mark Sears

NAD Staff: Katie Donahue, Julia Feder, Todd Juhasz, Kelly Smith, Bernadette Kuhn, Jenny Roberts, Matt Parker, Elaine Calaba, Emily Shingler, Kate Rentschlar, Kati Jacobson, Tawnya Ernst, Alynn Karnes, Mary Boyts

Excerpt related to this Council Meeting Agenda Item: Arapaho Bend Natural Area Restoration and Visitor Use Improvements Budget Appropriation.

6. ACTION ITEMS

Arapaho Bend Natural Area Restoration and Visitor Use Improvements Budget Appropriation

Kate Rentschlar, Environmental Planner stated she was seeking a recommendation from the LCSB that City Council approve the Ordinance to appropriate \$4.9 million from the Natural Areas Fund for river restoration and visitor use improvements at Arapaho Bend Natural Area.

Kate led the board through an overview of the project, sharing elements that would improve river health metrics and elements that would improve safety, ADA access, and resource protection. Kate explained the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department (FCNAD) has accrued funds for both projects over several years and has the full funding amount needed to complete the projects. Both projects are on track to begin construction in August 2026. This timeline is a year ahead of the anticipated schedule, which means that funds have not yet been appropriated for construction. Completing the projects a year earlier would save the City potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in inflation costs.

Discussion

LCSB Question: Is there money for planting at completion of project construction?

Staff Answer: Yes, the project includes a revegetation plan that is a mix of upland, riparian and

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wetland.

LCSB Question: Will the parking lot at the intersection of Horsetooth and Strauss Cabin remain and what is net gain or loss of parking spaces upon project completion?

Staff Answer: The current design is to move that parking lot south out of the right-of-way and reconfigure it. The reconfigured (north) lot and new south lot will accommodate approximately 30 vehicles each. The parking in the informal middle lot and parking along Strauss Cabin Road will be eliminated, and the total increase is approximately 10 parking spaces.

LCSB Question: What is the increase in drivable square feet on the property?

Staff Answer: Staff does not have that information at this meeting but can provide it later if needed.

LCSB Question: In the context of continued increase in visitor use, it sounds like we're not adding much parking; we're just moving it off the road. Is there a reason we're not doing more parking now while we have the money and the site is under construction?

Staff Answer: The design is constrained geographically by other landscape features, such as Strauss Cabin Rd, ditches, and the Poudre River Trail. The property does experience a lot of visitor access via the paved trail system. The Harmony Park and Ride lot could be investigated as an option for expanded parking in the future.

LCSB Question: Rather than close the middle lot, is there some way to keep it? My concern is that this infrastructure is already in use and people will eventually return to parking on the road.

Staff Answer: Staff expect the City's Streets Department will close parking on Strauss Cabin Road and illegal parking will receive enforcement action. Some of this will just simply be behavior change and redirecting visitors when lots are full. The biggest behavior change staff will be promoting is that the parking along Strauss Cabin Road is unsafe. The project would increase the footprint of the built infrastructure but reduce the access points to this sensitive site and funneling visitors in a way that makes more sense

LCSB Question: What's the path between the Harmony Park and Ride and Arapaho Band?

LCSB Answer: There is both a gravel and a concrete path.

LCSB Question: Will there be ample bike racks?

Staff Answer: Bike racks are included in the plans.

LCSB Question: Could interpretive signs be included?

Staff Answer: Yes, there will be kiosks at both parking lots which include educational information.

LCSB Comment: I'm concerned about the amount of parking we're adding. Where is the

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breaking point from gradual to precipitous decline due to the impact of automobiles near the ecosystem? Do you have any kind of objective metrics for the amount of parking that is sustainable?

Staff Answer: Staff does not currently have an occupancy level metric for the natural area sites. In some cases, parking helps to limit visitation. At Arapaho Bend, there are multiple ways people use the site. Visitor use design improvements, including the south parking lot, can guide access towards a single location and reduce resource degradation.

LCSB Comment: I don't think we need a metric that correlates visitors per year to number of parking spots. I was asking about environmental metrics because every added parking spot takes away habitat. At some point a gradual decline becomes substantial; a non-linear effect on how wildlife reacts, and how runoff and thermal microclimates change with large amounts of parking. I think we have an intuitive sense that certain sites we don't want to have a lot of parking because it would impact the habitat. I'm wondering if there's a way to objectively characterize that.

LCSB Question: Are the two parking areas permeable minimizing the stormwater footprint?

Staff Answer: Yes. The only concrete used will be for the ADA parking spots and potentially an ADA paved path to the pond and connection to the Poudre River Trail. Site plans include water quality mitigation for both parking lots.

LCSB Question: How was the budget established and are these "blue" money budget items?

Staff Answer: NAD has been working with design consultants for the past year who created cost estimates for us. Staff also ran independent estimates and compared them to the budget. Both projects were initially more expensive and staff worked to reduce costs on both get within our budget. This project has been part of the Natural Areas long range plan and the department has been saving for this project since 2010. Starting construction this year will result in significant savings due to inflation and escalating construction costs. River restoration work will be charged to "green" funds (restricted funds for land conservation and restoration activities, and visitor use improvements will be charged to "blue" funds (less restricted funds for operational and infrastructure costs).

LCSB Question: If we're investing a large amount of money in improving the habitat, let's be really careful and thoughtful about how much public access follows that. What are your thoughts with respect to public access?

Staff Answer: Currently, there is no public access on the east side of the river and there are no plans to open it to visitor use. On the west side of the river, there are multiple social trails and an official trail that run through the area. Staff will be rebuilding the official trail and will be working closely with our restoration staff and visitor use staff to determine the best alignment for the trail.

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LCSB Question: Because the public improvements are partly aimed at addressing areas where there is bank erosion and informal trails, are small restoration projects to repair erosion part of the budget?

Staff Answer: NAD Restoration staff noted there is decent vegetation adjacent to bare areas that will likely grow in but will target reseed as necessary.

LCSB Comment: Some people in the community are concerned about the ecological impacts of vehicle parking. We communicate with the public about the value of wetland habitats, etc. Perhaps we could also educate the public about how parking lots are designed to minimize environmental impacts.

Staff Answer: Both of the parking lots will have water quality features, something like a rain garden or swale.

LCSB Comment: During the restoration it's a great opportunity to explain to the public what is happening and why.

Staff Answer: The planning staff will be working closely with our communications team regarding messaging about the project, its importance and revegetation.

LCSB Question: I don't have enough understanding of how the budget buckets work. If we pull this from 2027 back into 2026 is there something else that will be delayed or just not done?

Staff Answer: This project has been part of our long-range plan for a number of years, and there are ample reserves in the Natural Areas Fund. The only potential trade-off could be a surprise land deal that we're not expecting. The department does not anticipate any impact on what is planned for the next two years.

LCSB Question: What impact does the purchase of the Hughes site have on the NAD budget?

Staff Answer: Staff know how many acres the department is responsible to pay for but the specific timing is yet to be determined, i.e. spread out of the life of the financing. Because most of the infrastructure of that project will not be in the natural area, NAD will be able to absorb the additional acres into our regular operations over the next couple of years.

Member Kley made a motion that the Land Conservation and Stewardship Board recommends that City Council approve the Ordinance to appropriate \$4.9 million in Natural Areas' funds for river restoration and visitor use improvements at Arapaho Bend Natural Area. Member Joyce seconded the motion. The motion passed 8-0.