

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

City Council



STAFF

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SUBJECT

Second 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Ordinance, unanimously adopted on First Reading on July 15, 2025, adopts 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.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends adoption of the Ordinance on Second Reading.

FIRST READING 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">• Ecological Function• Resource Protection• Connectivity• Integrity• Safety & Wellbeing• Belonging• Service• Partnership
Goals	Goals describe the major areas of work for the Department in the coming decade.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Conserve and Protect Land & Water2. Strengthen Habitats & Ecological Resilience3. Support Access to Nature4. Foster Community Connections & Stewardship

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

None.

FIRST READING BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

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.

SECOND READING BOARD / COMMISSION / COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

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.

The Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously recommends adoption of the Strategic Framework. Staff presented the plan at the July 11, 2025, Planning and Zoning Commission Work Session and sought a recommendation at the formal hearing on July 17, 2025. The full recommendation is transcribed below as the hearing minutes have not been finalized:

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommends that City Council adopt the Natural Areas Strategic Framework as a component of City Plan finding that, the Strategic Framework is a needed update of the 2014 Natural Areas Master Plan that was adopted as a component of City Plan and the Strategic Framework will promote the public welfare, and is consistent with the vision, goals, principles and policies of City Plan and its adopted components. This decision is based upon the agenda materials, information presented during the work session and this hearing, and commission discussion. The commission adopts the information, analysis, findings of fact, and conclusions regarding adopting the Natural Areas Strategic Framework as a component of City Plan, contained in the staff report included in the agenda materials for this hearing.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

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

First Reading attachments available in July 15, 2025, agenda materials at the following link: <https://fortcollins-co.municodemeetings.com/>.

1. Ordinance No. 124, 2025