

Background

In 2014, the City launched an effort called “Nature in the City” to ensure that, as our community grows to its build-out population, all residents have access to high-quality, natural spaces close to where they live and work. Whether it’s a formal natural area, neighborhood park, or just the open space behind your house, our primary objective is to create and maintain access to nature within Fort Collins.

Executive Summary

Over 1,000 residents have engaged in the dialogue around how to provide access to nature close to home as our community urbanizes. Key themes heard to date are as follows:

- Find opportunities to (1) escape from the urban environment, (2) find beauty, peace or opportunities for relaxation, (3) support wildlife, plants, and trees, and (4) engage in personal or group/family exercise or play.
- Maintain our current policies, e.g., Parks and Trails Master Plan and Natural Areas Master Plan;
- Continue to increase connectivity across the City, both for people and for wildlife;
- Identify ways to acknowledge the multiple values ditches provide;
- Be cognizant of additional costs efforts like these may add;
- Coordinate this effort with others, e.g., Climate Action Plan, Housing Affordability, etc.;
- Provide better wayfinding to nature; and
- Address disparities in access across the City.

Nature in the City Public Engagement Boards and Commissions:

- Commission on Disability
- Land Conservation & Stewardship Board
- Natural Resources Advisory Board
- Parks and Recreation Board
- Planning and Zoning Board
- Senior Advisory Board

Public Engagement:

- Launched Project Website
- 15-member Citizens Advisory Committee
- City Employee Blog Post
- Idea Lab Question
- Trans. and Planning Joint Open House
- Visioning Workshop
- City Works 101 Participants
- Air Quality Open House
- Project Survey
- Wikimap
- CSU Natural Resources Class
- Partnership with CSU Graduate Level Landscape Architecture Class
- Chamber Local Legislative Affairs Commission
- Fort Collins Board of Realtors
- Fort Collins Museum of Discovery
- NoCo Economic Development Commission
- Drake Road Farmers Market
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Built Environment Work Group
- Video - Project Overview on *Full Circle* show
- Fort Collins Housing Authority Property
- Common Ground Food School
- IBMC
- Teaching Tree Early Childhood Center
- South Fort Collins Business Assoc.
- North Fort Collins Business Assoc.
- Riversong School
- La Familia
- Rocky Mountain High School
- Partnership with CSU Senior-Level Wildlife Management Class
- Video “Nature in the City: What does this project mean to you”
- Larimer County Farmers Market
- Sustainable Living Fair

Public Engagement Feedback

Boards and Commissions

Since 2013, six City Boards and Commissions have been engaged in the dialogue around Nature in the City. Specific feedback from these entities is as follows:

Commission on Disability

The Commission discussed how open spaces are often inaccessible. Commissioners noted the provisions outlined in the Poudre River Downtown Plan for accessibility for all users and encouraged staff to explore other opportunities for providing access to nature that was accessible. The Commission also discussed the need for providing an off-leash dog area that was less formal than the City's existing dog parks.

Land Conservation and Stewardship Board

The Board expressed general support for the project and requested staff returns if there is a specific project the Board could support. The Board also discussed funding for this effort and how funding could be identified that would be in addition to the existing open space sales taxes.

Natural Resources Advisory Board

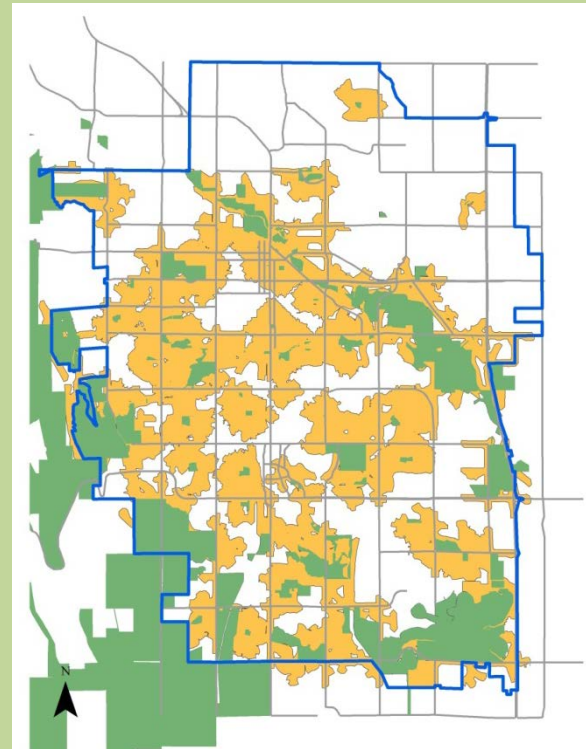
The Board has identified Nature in the City as one of the key projects in their 2014 Work Plan. Feedback from the Board has focused on how to mainstream Nature in the City into other city programs, e.g., parks and stormwater. Additional feedback has included how to consider the services provided by nature, the need to consider West Nile Virus with the implementation of this planning effort, and how we increase biodiversity across the City.

Parks and Recreation Board

The Board expressed an interest in this project and noted specific parks where nature is abundant, e.g., Indian Hills. The Board expressed an interest in participating in the Living Wall demonstration project. The Board also asked staff to be clear on the costs of implementing this project and including other spaces in the mapping effort, e.g., HOA open spaces.

Planning and Zoning Board

Staff is meeting quarterly with the Planning and Zoning Board. In concurrence with the Parks and Recreation Board, P&Z recommended including many types of open space within the project maps, e.g., schools and urban farms. The Board also helped prioritize the overall project goals in the spring of 2014.



This map illustrates the City's Parks and Natural Areas (in green) and those lands within a 10-minute walking distance from those public lands. Several Boards encouraged staff to include other types of open spaces within these maps, e.g., HOA open spaces, schools, etc. Staff is working to update this map accordingly.



Visioning Workshop Participants (Photo by Martin Carcasson)

Visioning Workshop

On March 26, 2014 at the Lincoln Center, over 60 Fort Collins residents participated in a community issues forum sponsored by the City of Fort Collins and the Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation. The forum focused on two topics: (1) Nature in the City, and (2) an update on the water restrictions plan.

The participants at the forum were placed in individual round tables with 4-7 other participants and a facilitator from the Center for Public Deliberation (CPD). Martín Carcasson, the Director of the CPD, facilitated the process, with assistance from City staff, and connected to the two topics. The forum was organized in several different sessions that had the participants respond to gathered information and various prompts.

Participants prioritized the following values for this project to emphasize:

1. Opportunities to escape from the urban environment
2. Places that are convenient/close to home, and
3. Wildlife opportunities (for both intrinsic value and for viewing).

An interesting tension was identified by CSU in the discussions and written comments among participants that preferred “nature” to be as natural, wild, and “minimally landscaped” as possible, while others preferred their experience with nature to be more managed and manicured.

For example, for some, concrete trails were a negative, but for others, such man-made features were important to provide access and a quality experience. For some, having natural spaces maintained was important; others preferred more of the wild look. For some, “critters” and bugs were a positive, for others, not so much.

Another difficult tension that may arise is between the focus on tranquility and open spaces, with the reality that the spaces will likely get busier and busier as the city grows. The more popular a spot becomes the less desirable it may become for some as well.

Lastly, Fort Collins is known for being a wonderful town for both bicycling and dog enthusiasts, and the city’s Parks and Natural Areas are critical to both bicyclists and dog-owners. On the other hand, problems with bicyclists and dogs were the most common concerns with Natural Areas when participants were queried.

Regardless of which group staff spoke with, the number one issue brought up was connectivity - both for people and for wildlife.

Business Community Outreach

Staff met with numerous individuals and groups from the business community to understand how access to nature attracts businesses and employees to the community and whether proximity to nature increases property or rental values. Staff also sought general feedback about the project from the business community.

Feedback generally focused on how Fort Collins' commitment to nature has paid off – the City is attractive and provides a high quality of life. Access to nature does help businesses recruit and retain employees. Anecdotal information suggests a premium of approximately 10% for lots adjacent to open space.

The business community asked staff to be mindful of adding costs to the development review process. They asked staff to look for ways that partnerships could be increased to “soften” commercial areas, e.g., the Downtown flowers. They also asked if there were any programs that could help encourage additional natural spaces in commercial areas.

In alignment with others, the business community also discussed the need for connectivity through the City and that access to natural or recreational spaces is very important.

Additional Open Houses or Events

Staff participated in or hosted numerous additional events (see page 1 for a full list). At each of these events, an overview of the project was presented and surveys were administered (either via keypad polling or paper surveys).

Key themes discussed at various events include those summarized on page 1. One of the key discussions with various parties included the notion of disparity in access depending on where you lived in the City. For examples, individuals in North Fort Collins and those in older neighborhoods felt disconnected from the City's open space network, even if it was nearby. Potential solutions discussed were retrofitting connectivity to these various spaces, increasing wayfinding and looking at opportunities to restore stormwater features or other, informal open spaces in their neighborhoods.



A focus group held with residents of Fort Collins Housing Authority apartment complexes (Photo by Rebecca Smith)

Residents at various outreach events noted the need to connect the City's open space network. In fact, connectivity was the number one issue brought up at almost every focus group staff held.

Other discussions focused on night skies – or the opportunity to see the stars at night, which benefits people and wildlife. Other ideas included designing the transit system to include stops at various open spaces throughout the City. There were also several discussions around the importance of education and the need to instill an appreciation for nature into our children.

Finally, there was a generally agreed upon need to provide additional clarity around open space requirements in multi-family (or apartment) style developments. Many residents expressed concerns about the lack of open space in recently approved developments.

WikiMap

Wikimaps are online, editable maps where participants can provide feedback on specific questions. In this exercise, respondents identified where they access nature within the City and where barriers to accessing nature were.

These results will be available at the beginning of October on the project's webpage at www.fcgov.com/natureinthecity.

A project survey was developed to solicit feedback from the community on whether nature is important to them, where residents access nature, why nature is important to them, and what residents believe this project should focus on, given current strengths and weaknesses. 365 surveys were received and the following graphs summarize the findings from the survey.

1. Find opportunities to escape from the urban environment,
2. Create places or restore existing spaces to find beauty, peace or opportunities for relaxation,
3. Support wildlife, plants, and trees, and
4. Create additional opportunities to engage in personal or group/family exercise or play.

Full survey results will be available at the beginning of October on the project's website at www.fcgov.com/natureinthecity.

The next phase of this project will focus on synthesizing the public outreach and developing a strategic plan for how we can continue to have high quality access to nature close to home.

Staff will be receiving feedback about the project from City Council at their October 28, 2014 Work Session. For additional outreach opportunities, please see the project's website.

Would you like to know more about this project?

Lindsay Ex, *Project Manager*
(970) 224-6143
lex@fcgov.com
www.fcgov.com/natureinthecity



Visioning Workshop Participants were asked what three words came to mind when asked to define nature. Note that wordles show which words appear more in the survey, via larger font sizes. In other words, the larger the word, the more respondents used that word to describe nature.