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Every year, donors give Fort Collins government millions. Here's what they funded in 2024

On just about every single City Council meeting agenda, you can see the constant flow of philanthropic revenue pouring into the city.

It's so routine, in fact, that much of the time it goes without a mention by city staff or council members as they appropriate individuals' donations to their desired projects.

In 2024, that philanthropy amounted to more than \$3.3 million in total: \$1.9 million in cash, \$1.14 million in real property and \$312,000 in sponsorships.

It's all because of a program created in 2019 called City Give. Donors can direct money to initiatives that have already been deemed a city priority.

While the money that comes in is just a sliver of the city's overall budget — it amounted to less than half a percent in 2024 — City Give Director Nina Bodenhamer said she's in awe of who gives to the city and why.

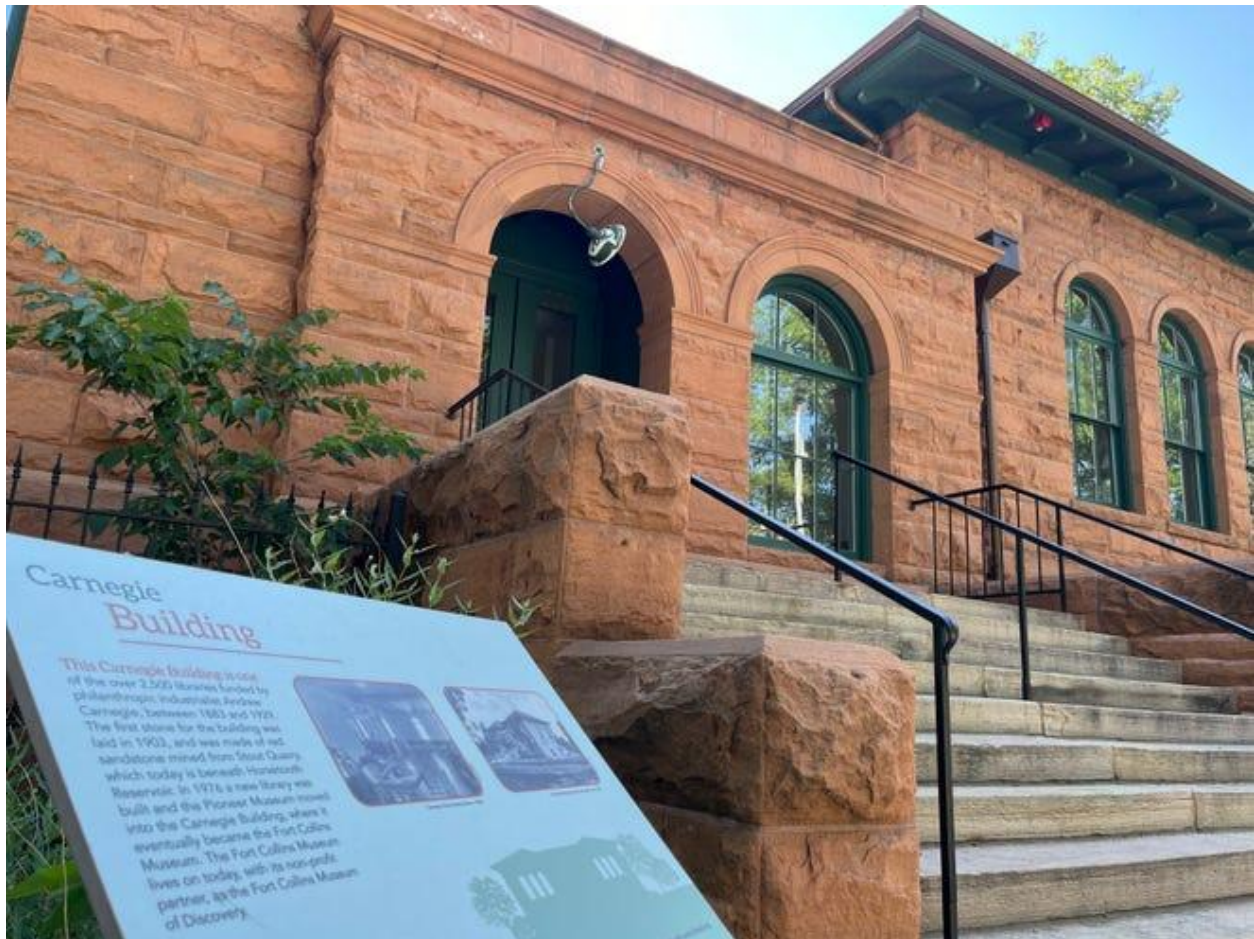
"This year I received a check for \$300 from a gentleman who now lives in Wyoming, and when he had lived in Fort Collins, he had been homeless. And he was really making reparations for some of his behavior," Bodenhamer said.

Another gift, to the city's payment assistance fund, came from a Denver resident who had needed help from that fund when they lived in Fort Collins.

One woman who had experienced a catastrophic event in her home was so appreciative of how Fort Collins Police Services' officers responded that she thanked them with a charitable gift through City Give.

"It's monthly I hear these beautiful stories," Bodenhamer said. "I have the most incredible job to be on the forefront of this."

Donors in 2024 provided money and real property for projects and sponsorships spanning many city departments, ranging from the [9/11 Memorial in Spring Park](#) and the [renovation of the Center for Creativity at the historic Carnegie Building](#) to a [pickleball study](#), table tennis equipment at the Senior Center and an [asphalt art traffic calming project](#) near the Lincoln Center.



From 2021 through 2024, more than \$10.3 million has come in to City Give, Bodenhamer said. That's an average of more than \$2 million annually.

The largest donation in 2024 was a [\\$622,000 grant for new recycling carts](#) as the city transitioned to a citywide trash hauling contract. The donation came from The Recycling Partnership.

The Center for Creativity brought in \$364,000 in donations.

Why does City Give exist?

Prior to City Give's creation, donations would come into the city through various departments, and none of them were tracking it the same way, Bodenhamer said. That made it difficult to see how much was being donated.

City Give was created to be a central business unit, ending what had been a disjointed process for anyone who wanted to donate before, she said.

The city believed creating a central department would create a better donor experience, bring in more donations and lead to better partnerships with nonprofits.

Many cities use what's called a mayor's fund, a separate nonprofit that advances the priorities of a mayor. But Fort Collins uses a city council-city manager governance structure rather than a strong mayor structure.

After Fort Collins conducted an audit of donations and began planning how it could reform the system, "we heard again and again, 'Don't start another nonprofit,'" Bodenhamer said. Her in-house team's work is all paid for through the general fund.

That means 100% of a donor's gift goes to its designated purpose. Donations are tax deductible. City Give is a 170(c)(1) public charity, like churches and schools.

Fort Collins' model appears to be unique, but other cities are moving to similar models, Bodenhamer said.

"We'll see more and more cities in this space," she said.

Still, the purpose of City Give isn't to increase revenue, Bodenhamer said.

"Cities sometimes mistakenly believe it's a way to increase our revenue," she said. "The largest byproduct is it increases the degree to which residents are engaged in your business."

All donations must go to city priority areas

City Give doesn't accept gifts that don't tie to strategic priorities or master plans.

"They can say, 'We want to plant trees.' They can't say, 'I want to plant a tree right there,' for a thousand reasons," Bodenhamer said. "That may not be a spot the city has purview or has a need."

The city also establishes specific projects to fundraise for, such as the 9/11 Memorial in Spring Park.



The City Manager's Office determines those fundraising priorities, Bodenhamer said, based on alignment with strategic priorities, audiences served, geographical reach, whether there are partnership opportunities or the potential to leverage funds, fundraising feasibility, the impacts on future budgets and whether the fundraising competes with community nonprofits.

Other donations come to City Give in the form of sponsorships, such as for the Fourth of July fireworks, Open Streets and Garden of Lights.

Finally, donors can give real property, which has taken the form of recreation equipment or even land.

When the "very loved and very worn" table tennis tables at the Fort Collins Senior Center were deteriorating, one man who was part of a table tennis club asked if he could buy a new one.

"He purchased a table and donated it to the city, and then other members stepped in and did the same," Bodenhamer said.

Does City Give give well-resourced residents unfair advantages?

One time that City Council members discussed a donation was in 2024, when money came in to conduct a feasibility study for constructing pickleball courts.

Mayor pro-tem Emily Francis expressed general concerns that a gift can create an equity issue if residents with access to resources can influence city projects when others don't have the same resources to push for what they want.

"What our council was concerned about was: Did it allow a group to advance their passion to the front of the line?" Bodenhamer said. "How we prevent that or protect the city and taxpayers from that is buckling every gift to the strategic plan."

When City Give has money to carry out one thing in the strategic plan, she said, it frees up money to do other things.

"That (study) could not have happened if pickleball was not in the master plan. And that was the next task that had to be done in order to understand the community need," Bodenhamer said.

As for the idea of "pay to play" expectations — "if I'm a donor, do I get better representation in city hall because I have money," as Bodenhamer put it — the IRS says that's illegal.

"We also have a few ways to remind donors that that is an illegal expectation or transaction," Bodenhamer said.

All donations above \$25,000 trigger the use of a gift agreement with the city attorney's office. Also, while the process calls on elected officials to approve the appropriations, it doesn't give them the ability to change where they go, she said.

Top 10 City Give donation areas in 2024

- Environmental Services: \$622,000 (for new trash carts)
- Center for Creativity at the historic Carnegie Building: \$364,000
- The Gardens on Spring Creek: \$216,000
- Immigration Defense: \$100,000
- Recreation: \$60,000
- Natural Areas: \$50,000
- Pianos About Town: \$47,000
- Lincoln Center: \$46,000
- Park Planning (Pickleball): \$40,000

- Payment Assistance Fund: \$33,000

Here are the remaining monetary donations, by department and program:

- 9/11 Memorial: \$30,000
- Asphalt Art: \$25,000
- Conflict Transformation Work: \$1,000
- Cultural Community Programming: \$30,000
- FC Moves: \$12,000
- Forestry: \$24,000
- Neighborhood Services: \$20,000
- Open Streets: \$12,000
- Parks: \$30,000
- Police Services and K9: \$14,000
- Senior Center: \$25,000
- The Farm at Lee Martinez Park: \$2,000
- Veterans Plaza: \$25,000
- Visual Arts: \$6,500
- Volunteers Services: \$25,500
- Youth Golf Scholarship: \$12,000
- Youth Sports: \$17,000
- **Total: \$1.89 million**

Event sponsorships and memberships:

- 2024 Police Leaders Summit: \$35,000
- Parks & Golf: \$37,000
- Cultural Services: \$150,000
- Recreation (The Farm, Kids in the Park): \$90,000
- **Total: \$312,000**

Gifts of real property:

- Real Estate/Park Planning: \$150,000 (Hanson farm park site)
- Natural Areas: \$950,000 (3805 East Vine Drive)
- Parks: \$45,000 (archery range improvements)
- Poudre Fire Authority: Appraisal in progress (cement truck)
- Recreation: \$3,000 (tennis tables)
- **Total: \$1.15 million**