

**OPEN SPACE**  
**LONGMONT, COLORADO**

CITY OF LONGMONT, COLORADO  
Department of Parks & Recreation, Open Space and Trails  
**OPEN SPACE AND Trails**  
**MASTER PLAN**  
VOLUME I



Adopted May 7, 2002

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ***I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***



The Longmont Open Space and Trails Master Plan has been prepared by the City of Longmont Community Development Department. The Plan was guided by citizen input and a Staff Advisory Committee. This committee was comprised of City of Longmont staff, representing a variety of Departments, as well as representatives from other neighboring agencies and resource experts.

The City's ordinance that created the Open Space Program is the guiding basis for the Plan. Input from the general public, City staff, the advisory committee, and the consulting team confirms that the ordinance fully and accurately represents the needs and desires of Longmont citizens. The Open Space Criteria spelled out in the ordinance identifies suitable land for preserving as open space in our study area and has been utilized as the basis for the evaluation process.

A citizen survey was widely distributed through the local newspaper and made available at convenient City locations. This was not intended to be a statistically valid sampling, but a method of gauging general public opinion. An important component of the survey questionnaire is the open-ended comments received (these are found in the Appendix.) These comments have led to a better understanding of public sentiment.

Support for the Plan has been evident through citizen involvement between September 2001 and January 2002. A draft plan was taken to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board on December 10, 2001, and January 14, 2002 for discussion. On January 14, 2002 the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board voted to adopt the plan with additional recommendation and directing the plan to City Council for adoption and implementation. City Council will have the opportunity to review the draft Plan and Board recommendations on January 29, 2002.

The area considered for open space and trails acquisition by this Plan is 80 square miles, bounded on the west by 65<sup>th</sup> St., on the north by Vermillion Road, on the east by a boundary of one mile east of Weld County Road 7

and on the south by Oxford Road. However, acquisition may not be limited to this area.

### ***Vision and Goals for the Open Space and Trails Program***

A Vision Statement, developed through the public process, blended with Open Space Criteria and resultant goals has been used to help develop the Plan.

#### *Vision Statement*



Connecting our people with our natural resources...

...Preserving our heritage

...Respecting our environment

...Defining our community

...Balancing our growth

...Treasuring our children's future

...Protecting what we value.

Be a part of Longmont's future, today

#### *Goals*

The following goals are supported by the ordinance language criteria as indicated.

##### *1. Preserve Natural and Cultural Resources*

Preserve natural areas, wildlife habitat, wetlands, agriculture and visual corridors. Conserve natural resources including, but not limited to, forest lands, range lands, agricultural lands, aquifer recharge areas, and surface water.

##### *2. Provide Connections*

Provide linkages and trails, access to public lakes, streams and other usable open space lands, stream corridors and scenic corridors along existing roadways.

3. *Provide for Low-Impact Recreation Compatible with Resource Protection Goals*

District parks devoted to low-impact recreational uses.

4. *Acknowledge Previous Planning Efforts*

Implement greenways and open space policies or strategies of the Longmont Area Comprehensive Plan.

5. *Provide Urban Shaping Buffers and Buffer Zones*

Provide urban shaping buffers between or around municipalities or community service areas and buffer zones between residential and non-residential development.

## **Recommendations**

### *OPEN SPACE PARCEL ACQUISITION*

1) *Apply the Open Space Criteria Through a Tiered Approach for Prioritizing Acquisitions*

**Tier I:** Mapping tools, based on the open space criteria of the Open Space Ordinance, should be used as a guide to determine from a broad-brush perspective, how many, and what type of values are present on the property, including:

- Ecology and Wildlife
- Agricultural Lands
- Visual Access
- Linkage / Access
- Urban Shaping/Buffer
- Surface Water
- Low-Impact Recreation

**Tier II:** At this level we begin to look at individual parcels with a finer filter. Evaluation tools should be used to further evaluate individual parcels to determine the degree of each value present through additional field study and evaluate for other criterion including:

- Willingness of seller
- Wildlife /vegetation and restoration potential
- Recreation value and adjacent land uses
- Cost/benefit of acquisition and long-term management
- Cultural and historic value

This evaluation will allow staff to determine acquisition priorities by means of comparison.

**Tier III:** Determine who should acquire the parcel, if it is a partnering opportunity and what is the appropriate acquisition technique.

- 2) *Seek Boulder and Weld County support of this plan prior to the approval by City.*
- 3) *Parks and Recreation/Open Space and Trails Staff should meet with Planning Staff to review and evaluate the applicability of the regulatory techniques and financial incentives, and determine which are appropriate for use.*
- 4) *Evaluate the potential of a future Open Space ballot initiative or extension of the current initiative.*
- 5) *A Charter revision should be drafted to add “open space” terminology to Article 13.2 of the Charter, in order to afford the same protection to Open Space lands as exists for Park lands.*

#### TRAIL ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

- 1) *The general philosophy of the trail system should be to provide a recreational, multi-use corridor without favoring a specific type of user.*
- 2) *Trail development will, in general, follow guidelines established in the St. Vrain Greenway Master Plan Update (2001) for trail types and cross sections, structures, and trail furnishings. Furnishings and signage will be the same or similar with appropriate modifications made for more rural and natural settings. For example, the blue color scheme might become an earth-toned scheme of greens and browns.*
- 3) *An additional trail type is recommended, known as a Backcountry or Single Track Trail, for when the trail accesses somewhat remote wildlife viewing areas and natural features, and where the goal of the trail is to offer a more natural experience.*
- 4) *Trailheads should occur where roads intersect trails and a suitable pull-out or curb cut can be attained, especially in rural areas.*
- 5) *Trail acquisition should focus on missing links and strategies should include fee-simple acquisition, easement acquisition, partnering with other agencies, and developer requirements.*

## MANAGEMENT ISSUES

### **Organization and Operations**

#### Staffing and Administration

- 1) *The Park and Recreation Advisory Board should continue to advise City Council on the preservation, acquisition, and management of open space, along with the acquisition, provision and management of active park and recreation resources.*
- 2) *A strong relationship must be maintained between the Open Space and Trails, Parks, and Recreation sections of the Division that will share common resources, including staffing and equipment.*
- 3) *Contracting within the Parks and Recreation Division related to resource elements such as weed management, agricultural leases, and others, should shift to the Open Space and Trails Program.*
- 4) *A Parks and Recreation Division-wide Volunteer Coordinator is recommended with duties specific to the Open Space and Trails Program.*
- 5) *Employee resource to focus on vegetation and weed management should be considered early on.*
- 6) *A public relations program, with strong information and communications plans, should be developed and implemented.*
- 7) *Research and evaluation will be necessary for science-based management.*
- 8) *A visitor center /resource library at Sandstone Ranch should become a reality, assisting with the implementation of a strong public relations program.*
- 9) *Park ranger service is anticipated as a future need with an emphasis on visitor services, resource protection and environmental education, rather than law enforcement.*

#### Signage

- 1) *Signage will, in general, follow guidelines established in the St. Vrain Greenway Master Plan Update (2001). Signage will be the same or similar with appropriate modifications made for more rural and natural settings. For example, the blue color scheme might become an earth-toned scheme of greens and browns.*
- 2) *Signage will include free-standing signs for parcels with anticipated access, boundary signs for parcels not open to public access, trail marker signs and information kiosks.*

### Naming of Properties

- 1) *Naming of properties should follow the same policy and procedure as established for park naming.*

### Memorials

- 1) *Appropriate areas should be designated and standardized plaques should be used for memorial benches and trees.*

## **Policy Development**

### Low-Impact Recreation

- 1) *Art, fishing, hiking/jogging, non-motor boating, photography, picnicking, reading and wildlife viewing appear to be acceptable to the Longmont community on open space lands and should be generally allowed. Management should use its prerogative in generally allowing, yet establishing parameters for each of the activities.*
- 2) *All other activities would not generally be associated with open space, however, on a case-by-case basis, certain activities could be addressed to determine if an activity is appropriate for park land or is appropriate and could be accommodated on open space land without undue impact to the property and its resources.*
- 3) *The trails system provides the opportunity to accommodate certain uses, such as road bike and horse use, which were found to be not generally acceptable to the open space lands, but could be viewed differently when considering the trail system within open space. These types of activities would be assigned to designated portions of the trails system.*
- 4) *The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, being able to see the broad picture of needs versus land resources for active parks and open space should provide advice on the appropriateness of recreational activities.*
- 5) *Staff, Advisory Board and City Council need to be clear about intentions when acquiring property for parks or for open space. A master plan for use and management of each parcel should be developed upon acquisition, based on the discussions leading to the decision to acquire the property, and continuing public process.*

### Dog Management

- 1) *As an overall philosophy:*
  - *In general, dogs should not be allowed off leash on open space properties*
  - *dogs should be allowed on-leash in designated areas; and*

- *there should be designated areas where dogs should not be allowed, for the purpose of protection of the wildlife resource and in order to provide a dog free trail experience.*
- 2) *There is support for specific areas, such as dog parks, to be set aside for dogs off-leash. A comprehensive look should be given to the entire parks and open space system to determine where dog parks are appropriate.*
  - 3) *A comprehensive effort to address the issue of dog management should include:*
    - *An aggressive educational campaign*
    - *A map showing areas for dogs on leash, dogs off-leash, no dogs, and dog parks should be created for distribution.*
    - *A coalition should be built with any local dog owner groups and the Humane Society*
    - *Cooperation should be sought with Animal Control Units from both the City and the Counties.*

#### Wildlife

- 1) *Open Space lands are acquired and managed for ecosystem effectiveness and for the accomplishment of multiple goals. The philosophy of the City should allow the coexistence of wildlife and human activity on Open Space properties whenever possible.*
- 2) *A wildlife management plan should be pursued as a next step, working in unison with neighboring and resource agencies.*
- 3) *To the extent possible, wildlife management on Open Space sites should preserve existing wildlife habitats and promote improvement of degraded habitats.*
- 4) *Prairie dog habitat has been identified as the largest single wildlife issue facing the City of Longmont currently. The wildlife management plan should specifically include a section addressing prairie dog habitat management.*
- 5) *The bald eagle and the Preble's meadow jumping mouse are listed under the Endangered Species Act and are known to inhabit the Longmont area. The wildlife management plan should specifically include sections addressing bald eagle and Preble's habitat management.*

#### Gravel Mining

- 1) *Land eligible for gravel mining should be weighed on a case-by-case basis using the advantages and disadvantages analysis created at the public meeting, and evaluating staff impacts, other relevant information and current circumstances, such as funding and other priorities.*

### Long Range Management and Maintenance Costs

- 1) *Until a more refined study is available, or Longmont is able to determine its own costs, assumptions developed through a survey of front range agencies should be applied, as appropriate, to current and potential open space parcels to determine an operating budget.*
- 2) *An appropriate balance will need to be struck between operating and acquisition funding, which could result in a policy regarding the amount of money available for each purpose.*
- 3) *The Open Space Fund is established through December 31, 2020. Steps will need to be taken to assure that long-term funding for management and maintenance of the lands is secured. Discussions may need to take place in the very near future to meet current open space desires, but, in any event, discussions should take place no later than several years prior to 2020 to allow adequate time to appropriately assess the desires of the community before the expiration of the tax.*

### Area Management Plans

- 1) *As the open space system grows, areas should be defined to accommodate the different needs of the lands as an efficient management tool. An inventory of what exists in each area should be recorded and methods and costing of ongoing management and maintenance should be developed for each area.*

### **Updating the Plan**

The progress on this Open Space and Trails Master Plan should be monitored annually with Council. Reviews and updates of this plan should occur every five years. Priorities for acquisition and activities that are acceptable may change over time, and other planning documents of the City of Longmont and surrounding areas will be updated and may have an impact on this program.