

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

FORT COLLINS CITY COUNCIL

ITEM NUMBER: 13

DATE: August 17, 1999

STAFF: Frank W. Bruno

SUBJECT:

Second Reading of Ordinance No. 133, 1999, Authorizing the Conveyance of a Non-Exclusive Easement for Parking to Colorado State University Through the State Board of Agriculture in Connection with the Environmental Learning Center/Visitor Center Project.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends adoption of the Ordinance on Second Reading.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Resolution 99-97, which was unanimously adopted August 3, 1999, authorizes the Mayor to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with CSU. The agreement specifies the term of the Agreement (50 years) and sets out the respective rights and responsibilities of the parties regarding the leased space. The Agreement also sets forth certain terms and conditions between the City and the University regarding the development of the Center.

Ordinance No. 133, 1999, which was also unanimously adopted on First Reading on August 3, 1999, conveys an easement to CSU on City property (roughly ½ acre on the Resource Recovery Farm). The purpose of the easement is to allow CSU to develop a parking lot that will serve both the Center, and the Geologic Gardens (Rock Park - described in detail at the end of this summary). The 2-acre Rock Park will be located adjacent to the parking lot and the Center, and will be developed in 2000 and 2001.

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

FORT COLLINS CITY COUNCIL

ITEM NUMBER: 21 A-B

DATE: August 3, 1999

STAFF: Frank W. Bruno

SUBJECT:

Items Related to the Development of the Visitors Center at the Environmental Learning Center (the Center).

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends adoption of the Resolution and of the Ordinance on First Reading.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The development of the Center will cost approximately \$1.8 million. This will be funded roughly as follows: Colorado State University (46% of total project cost) \$850,000, Colorado State Parks (33% of total project cost) \$500,000, City of Fort Collins (19.3% of total project cost) \$340,000. Further, CSU will pay \$37,000 for parking lot paving and \$107,000 towards future Prospect Road improvements. City staff expects to request Council approval in the 2000-01 Budget to pay for street oversizing related to the project and for the construction of a turn-bay into the site from Prospect Road. The City will program funding in future years for the eventual re-engineering and reconstruction of Prospect Road. This will follow the adoption of a storm water master plan for the Boxelder drainage basin. The City will receive a 50-year lease for space within the Center in exchange for its total payment to CSU. Staff anticipates that the City's share of annual facility operation and maintenance charges (roughly \$10,000 to \$15,000) will be paid by the City's on-site vendor (the Convention Bureau).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- A. Resolution 99-97 Authorizing the Mayor to Enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with Colorado State University Through the State Board of Agriculture for the Long-term Lease of Visitor Center Space at the Environmental Learning Center.
- B. First Reading of Ordinance No. 133, 1999, Authorizing the Conveyance of a Non-Exclusive Easement for Parking to Colorado State University Through the State Board of Agriculture in Connection with the Environmental Learning Center/Visitor Center Project.

Resolution 99-97 authorizes the Mayor to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with CSU. The agreement specifies the term of the Agreement (50 years) and sets out the respective rights and responsibilities of the parties regarding the leased space. The Agreement also sets forth certain terms and conditions between the City and the University regarding the development of the Center.

Ordinance No. 133, 1999, conveys an easement to CSU on City property (roughly ½ acre on the Resource Recovery Farm). The purpose of the easement is to allow CSU to develop a parking lot that will serve both the Center, and the Geologic Gardens (Rock Park – described in detail at the end of this summary). The 2-acre Rock Park will be located adjacent to the parking lot and the Center, and will be developed in 2000 and 2001.

BACKGROUND:

Since 1996, City staff has been working closely with representatives from Colorado State University, Colorado State Parks, and the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) concerning the development of the Environmental Learning Center/Visitors Center.

The Center will focus on environmental education, and will provide information about our local and state parks, as well as the City's museums, trails and other local attractions. This appears to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to implement the vision that many community leaders have worked to develop for the past ten years: to establish a multi-function visitor gateway, and environmental education and cultural complex at Prospect Road and I-25.

Location:

The proposed Center will be located on five (5) acres owned by CSU and located on the south side of Prospect Road, approximately one-quarter mile west of Interstate 25, and adjacent to the City's Resource Recovery Farm (see attached map). The property was donated to CSU for the Environmental Learning Center/Visitors Center by the K & M Company, and has been annexed into the City as part of the CSU campus.

Vision:

The objective of this project is to create a world-class visitor and environmental education complex. This facility will offer opportunities to focus visitor attention on CSU's Environmental Learning Center, River Bend Ponds, the City's Resource Recovery Farm, CSU's agricultural farm, the trail system, adjacent natural areas, and other community amenities. The concept is consistent with the goals cited in the GOCO *Legacy Project*, *Prospect Road Streetscape Program*, and the recommendations evolving from the *Poudre River Land Use Framework Plan*. The project is also compatible with the goals and objectives of the *Northern Colorado Regional Planning Study*, specifically the community gateway concept.

Education Element: The facility will include classrooms as well as interactive educational opportunities within the larger ELC complex. Living demonstrations of native landscape will be used for interpretative learning, and the Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps. will organize programs for at-risk youth on-site that encourage the development of leadership skills and self-confidence.

Tourism Element: The State of Colorado has designated the Center as the eighth and final official State Visitors Center. The State has agreed to provide a minimum of \$50,000 in funding each year to pay for the operation of the State Welcome Center portion of the Environmental Learning Center/Visitors Center.

In addition, the CVB will relocate its offices to the new center, providing visitor information services to an anticipated 300,000 to 400,000 visitors during the first year of operation. This estimate was derived from information provided by the State of Colorado, and is based on the number of actual visitors traveling south on I-25. In addition, data was evaluated from official visitor centers in other parts of the state. It is anticipated that this visitor center will be one of the busiest, due in part to the twenty-million people who pass by each year on the northern corridor of Interstate 25.

This multi-agency approach will provide a more friendly, accessible and informative experience for the visitor. The CVB will direct the visitor's focus to the activities of the Center and surrounding properties, as well as providing information on the community's many attractions. This will include museums, performing arts and events, galleries, trail system, and of course our many hotel properties, shops and restaurants. The CVB's current location at the corner of Howes and Mulberry is fairly limited in terms of visitor parking, display area, and overall ability to influence the visitor before they have made their decision whether to spend time in Fort Collins.

Partnership:

The attached schematic illustrates the conceptual design for the Center. CSU's overall construction costs for the project are estimated at roughly \$1.8 million. CSU will obtain funds for the project as follows:

Colorado State University	\$850,000.
Colorado State University (parking lot/escrow)	\$145,000.
Colorado State Parks	\$500,000.
CVB / Private Sector / Hotels	\$ 30,000.
City of Fort Collins (lease payment)	<u>\$340,000.</u>
Base Project Total	\$1,830,000.

Funding from the City:

The City's lease payment to CSU will be paid from a combination of Lodging Tax Capital Reserve Funds (\$150,000) and a General Fund appropriation of \$220,000 that was approved by Council as part of the 1998-1999 City budget.

The Prospect Road turn-bay construction that is estimated to cost \$210,000 is expected to be jointly funded by the City and CSU. CSU has agreed to pay \$107,400 toward construction of this improvement. The City's share, if approved by Council, would be a one-time appropriation as part of the 2000-2001 City budget. The General Fund may then be reimbursed over a 2-3 year period from Lodging Tax received over the cap on the City's contract with the CVB. This amounts to roughly \$50,000 per year. The General Fund will also be required to purchase the roughly 3-acre site that will be used for the parking lot and the Rock Park from the Water/Wastewater Utility. This amount may also be reimbursed to the General Fund through Lodging Tax receipts.

Other Points to Consider:

- The Center will showcase the Fort Collins community, CSU, and the State of Colorado to the traveling public in a unique and integrated facility.
- The project will create an attractive and central gateway to the community that is readily accessible.
- An information clearinghouse will be established that increases visibility for the natural, cultural, recreational, and historical resources of Fort Collins.

- This partnership among various agencies encourages efficient use of resources and building space, and eliminates monthly rent for the agencies involved, enabling those resources to be reallocated to facility enhancements and maintenance needs.
- The Center will facilitate closer relationships among the partnering agencies, and CSU's nationally recognized tourism faculty. This will also create opportunities for student interns and community volunteers to develop links with recreation and tourism professionals.

Geologic/Rock Park Component:

In addition to the exciting work on the Environmental Learning Center/Visitors Center, staff has been working with the non-profit Geological Society of America (GSA is headquartered in Boulder) on yet another exciting concept. GSA has proposed the development of a 2-acre *Rock Park or Geological Gardens* adjacent to the ELC/Visitors Center. The GSA would raise the funds necessary to develop the 2-acre parcel on the northern portion of the City's Resource Recovery Farm (the City retains ownership of the site at all times). The site will be designed in such a way that will enable the Rock Park to share parking and other transportation options with the ELC/Visitors Center.

In essence, the concept involves replicating the geology and topography of the State of Colorado, roughly in the shape of the State, on the 2-acre site. As you can see from the attached schematic, the plains, Front Range, mountains, canyons and plateaus will be replicated using rock samples purchased and moved on site by the GSA. Following the complete development of the project, the Park will be turned over to the City of Fort Collins to operate and maintain. The hours and operation of the Rock Park will be coordinated with the activities and staffing of the ELC/Visitors Center.

In exchange for receiving the developed Rock Park, the City will agree to operate and maintain the Park for a period of 25 years. The City and GSA have agreed to include an early termination clause in the agreement between the City and GSA in the event that the Park is either not successful, or becomes an undue burden to operate and maintain. It should be noted that GSA has committed to covering the costs that may be involved in replacing rock samples, or addressing major Park restoration.

Since no buildings or significant structures will be involved it is estimated that the annual maintenance cost for this facility will be in the range of \$10,000 to \$15,000. (GSA is budgeting roughly \$4,000 per year in addition to this amount.) There will be a minimal cost to irrigate plants, trees and shrubs, and provide emergency lighting (the facility will close at dusk; evening operation is not anticipated).

GSA anticipates that the development of the Park will cost roughly \$700,000, and will require approximately one year to accomplish. Rock sample collection has been ongoing and with actual construction of the Park to occur in 2000 and 2001. This would complement the proposed spring 2000 opening of the ELC/Visitors Center.

List of Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. ELC/Visitors Center Site Plan
- C. Parking Lot / Easement Site Plan
- D. Rock Park Diagram

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