



Legislation Text

File #: 16-00047, **Version:** 3

Ordinance No. 16-24 amending Ordinance No. 15-86 (2016 Appropriation Ordinance) for a Supplemental Appropriation to the Trails Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Fund in the Amount of \$980,000 for the Acquisition of Approximately 200 Acres Owned by Joanne R. Watkins for the Purpose of Public Open Space and Trails

Presenter:

Chris Lieber, Park Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager

Summary:

The attached supplemental appropriation ordinance from the Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Fund is to increase the spending authority by \$980,000 for the acquisition of approximately 200 acres owned by Joanne R. Watkins for the purpose of public open space and trails as an extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park.

Previous Council Action:

On February 23, 2016, City Council approved a supplemental appropriation to the TOPS Fund in the amount of \$980,000. Council did request additional information regarding the prioritization of land acquisition within the TOPS program.

Background:

The Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Program has identified a 200-acre parcel of property (Watkins Property) located adjacent to Cheyenne Mountain State Park and along Rock Creek and immediately west of Cheyenne Mountain State Park, between the State Park and the Pike National Forest which is owned by Joanne R. Watkins (Seller) and more specifically known as Tax Schedule Numbers 7500000243 and 7500000061, as having open space values that merit preservation. Acquisition of the Watkins Property would serve as an extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park, provide future trail access for the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Trail, and connect the Cheyenne Mountain State Park to the Pike National Forest.

The 2014 Park System Master Plan identified this area as an open space candidate meriting conservation. The 1997 Open Space Master Plan identified this area as having some of the highest natural resource values in our community. The Watkins Property boasts outstanding perennial water resources, unique geology, vegetation and wildlife habitat.

The TOPS Program partnered with Colorado State Parks in 2001 to acquire the original 1,600-acre Cheyenne Mountain State Park. In 2008-2011, the City purchased additional property to the west of the park to provide trail connections to the top of Cheyenne Mountain. This trail connection, known as the Dixon Trail, is currently under construction. The Watkins Property provides an opportunity to advance the future development of the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Trail, offering a truly unique trail

experience around the base of Cheyenne Mountain. The Watkins Property is immediately adjacent to property previously purchased by the City of Colorado Springs through the TOPS Program.

Colorado State Parks has agreed to manage, maintain and operate the Watkins Property. This management responsibility is consistent with other City/TOPS acquired properties that comprise Cheyenne Mountain State Park. Public access to the Watkins Property would be provided through Cheyenne Mountain State Park via the existing trail system within the State Park. The Seller has agreed to provide an easement on adjacent property, at the base of Rock Creek Canyon, for parking of maintenance and service vehicles. An existing easement provides access along the Rock Creek Corridor for management and maintenance purposes of the Watkins Property. The existing easement does not provide for public access from Rock Creek Canyon Road. Colorado State Parks will be responsible for all management, maintenance, and operational expenses associated with the Watkins Property.

The TOPS Working Committee has toured the Watkins Property on several occasions and staff has been in discussions with the Seller for the past five years. The TOPS Program has explored numerous strategies including purchasing the Watkins Property in phases, bargain sale(s) and conservation easements. The Seller has offered to sell the 200-acre Watkins Property to the City of Colorado Springs through the TOPS Program for open space purposes. The Seller has offered to sell the Watkins Property for a purchase price of \$980,000 or \$4,900 per acre. The City has obtained an appraisal that supports this value and purchase price. To facilitate access to the Watkins Property for maintenance and management purposes, the Seller has agreed to provide an easement for a small parking area on adjacent owned property (TSN:7500000245).

This item supports the City's strategic goal relating to building community and collaborative relationships. The Property will add to the overall experience of Cheyenne Mountain State Park. The collaboration between the City and Colorado State Parks ensures management of the Watkins Property will be provided by State Parks and future trail connections through the Watkins Property will be planned jointly between the two entities.

Financial Implications:

The supplemental appropriation increases the 2016 Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Fund expenditure budget by \$980,000. The purchase will be from the Open Space Category. In accordance with the TOPS Ordinance requirements, a minimum of 60% of the TOPS revenue must be spent on open space.

Estimated TOPS Funds available for appropriation as of January 1, 2016 equal \$6,316,700 or 100% of the 2016 expenditure budget. The 2016 TOPS budget includes a \$1,678,277 planned contribution to the fund balance.

Board/Commission Recommendation:

The TOPS Working Committee and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board unanimously recommend the acquisition of the Watkins Property and the expenditure of \$980,000 from the Open Space Category of the Trails, Open Space and Parks fund balance for this acquisition.

Stakeholder Process:

The TOPS Working Committee meetings and Park and Recreation Advisory Board meetings provide opportunities for public input. In addition, staff has met with representatives from the Trails and Open

Space Coalition and the Friends of Cheyenne Mountain State Park who are also in support of this acquisition.

Alternatives:

N/A

Proposed Motion:

Move to Approve an Ordinance Amending Ordinance No. 15-86 (2016 Appropriation Ordinance) for a Supplemental Appropriation to the Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Fund in the Amount of \$980,000 for the Acquisition of Approximately 200 Acres Owned by Joanne R. Watkins for the Purpose of Public Open Space and Trails as an Extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park.

An Ordinance Amending Ordinance No. 15-86 (2016 Appropriation Ordinance) for a supplemental appropriation to the Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) Fund in the amount of \$980,000 for the acquisition of approximately 200 acres owned by Joanne R. Watkins for the purpose of public open space and trails as an extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park.