



## Legislation Text

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A Resolution Authorizing 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

**Presenter:**

Chris Lieber, Park Development Manager/TOPS Program Manager

**Summary:**

On April 1, 1997, an ordinance implementing a sales tax for trails, open space and parks was approved by the citizens of Colorado Springs. This tax went into effect on July 1, 1997. In 2003 this ordinance was amended to extend the Trails, Open Space and Parks (TOPS) sales tax through 2025. The TOPS Working Committee is responsible for setting priorities and making recommendations for the expenditures of TOPS funds. The TOPS Program has identified the 200-acre Watkins property (Property), located adjacent to Cheyenne Mountain State Park and along Rock Creek, as having open space values that merit preservation. Acquisition of the Property would serve as an extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park, provide future trail access for the Cheyenne Mountain Heritage Trail, and connect Cheyenne Mountain State Park to the Pike National Forest.

**Previous Council Action:**

N/A

**Background:**

The Property (Property), currently owned by Joanne R. Watkins (Seller), more specifically known as Tax Schedule Numbers 7500000243 and 7500000061, lies along Rock Creek, immediately west of Cheyenne Mountain State Park, between the State Park and 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 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 Property. This management

responsibility is consistent with other City/TOPS acquired properties that comprise Cheyenne Mountain State Park. Public access to the property would be provided through Cheyenne Mountain State Park via the existing trail system within the Park. The Seller has agreed to provide an easement on adjacent property, at the base of the 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 to the 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 Property.

The Seller has offered to sell the 200-acre Property to the City of Colorado Springs through the TOPS Program for open space purposes. The Seller has offered to sell the 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 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 Watkins 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 property will be provided by State Parks and future trail connections through the property will be planned jointly between the two entities.

**Financial Implications:**

Acquisition of the Property will require funding of \$980,000 from the Open Space category of the Trails, Open Space and Parks, (TOPS) available fund balance. In accordance with the TOPS Ordinance requirements, a minimum of 60% of the TOPS revenue must be spent for 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.

Colorado State Parks will be responsible for management, operations and maintenance of the Property. The City will amend the current Cheyenne Mountain Management Agreement between the City of Colorado Springs and Colorado State Parks to include the Property.

**Board/Commission Recommendation:**

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

**Stakeholder Process:**

The TOPS Working Committee meetings and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meetings provide opportunities for public comment. In addition, TOPS staff has met with representatives from the Trails and Open Space Coalition and the Friends of Cheyenne Mountain State Park who also support the proposed acquisition.

**Alternatives:**

N/A

**Proposed Motion:**

Move approval of the Resolution authorizing the acquisition of a 200-acre Parcel Known as the Watkins Property for the Purpose of Public Open Space and Trails as an extension of Cheyenne Mountain State Park.

N/A