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Managing growth around a growing Buckley Air Force Base

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By QUINCY SNOWDON Staff Writer, Updated: February 27, 2015 7:07 am

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AURORA | Over 1,000 acres of land surrounding Buckley Air Force Base could see renovations and changes in ownership in the coming years due to a new initiative intended to improve the buffer zones along the base’s borders.



Met with no objection at a city council study session Feb. 2, the BAFB Compatible Use Buffer project aims to thwart incompatible development adjacent to the base by transferring ownership of federally owned and private land to the city of Aurora. The city’s Parks, Recreation and Open Space Department would then turn much of the newly acquired land into greenway and open space, according to information outlined at the study session.

"It's not a new concept, but it's kind of new because it has a new life to it and probably at this point in time more likelihood of actually being funded and implemented," Curtis Bush, a principal planner with the city's parks department, said in a presentation during the Feb. 2 session.

Stemmed from an Air Force initiative started in 2013, the project is designed to both improve the long-term viability of BAFB and provide resource protection by expanding bike trails and pedestrian paths surrounding the base, according to Bush's presentation.

The city currently owns just 10 acres of land within Buckley's expanded 1,078-acre buffer zone, with the remaining acreage split about 70 percent to 30 percent between private owners and the federal government. Under the new proposal, a series of land swaps and purchases would result in the city owning 915 acres of the buffer zone and leave 163 acres in the hands of the federal government.

The project in its entirety is estimated to cost \$26.6 million based on similar property values in the area. To attain the necessary funds, national nonprofit the Trust for Public Land submitted a proposal on behalf of BAFB for \$13.3 million from the Federal Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative, a grant program intended to sustain the vitality of American military bases.

"The purpose of the REPI app was to kind of go on a fishing trip to throw the line out and to see if we can get a bite," Bush said in his presentation. "And it seems like the project is ranked really high nationally."

Authors of the grant proposal have heard informally that the \$13.3 million grant application was approved, though no official announcement has been made, according to city documents. The Colorado Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is also seeking \$5 million from the state for the project in the department's 2015-2016 budget request.

Revenue streams that could make up the difference between the \$26 million the project is estimated to require and the approximately \$18 million currently requested have not yet been determined, though the Arapahoe County open space tax as well as payments and in-kind contributions received through land swap transactions were mentioned at the study session.

The city's Management and Finance Committee was slated to discuss the proposed easements at a session on Feb. 25.

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