



Board Summary Report

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Agenda Date: 2/10/2026

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To: Board of County Commissioners

Through: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces; Bryan Weimer, Director, Public Works and Development

Prepared By:
Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces

Presenter: Gini Pingnot, Director, Open Spaces; Bryan Weimer, Director, Public Works and Development

Subject:
10:00 AM *Water Policy and Program Business Case for the High Line Canal

Purpose and Request:

Open Spaces (OS) and Public Works & Development (PWD) are seeking direction from the Board of County Commissioners on three items:

- 1) Concurrence to allow new direct stormwater connections (a term that needs to be defined) into the High Line Canal (HLC);
- 2) Support the framework proposed to develop a HLC Stormwater Program; and
- 3) concurrence that both PWD and OS shall work on this program.

Alignment with Strategic Plan: Good Governance - Understand and respond to community needs, interests, and values.

Background and Discussion: Arapahoe County owns 45 miles (of 71 miles) of the High Line Canal (HLC). The impetus of owning the HLC was primarily to preserve a natural/recreational amenity. Today, Denver Water is no longer running irrigation water in the canal. They are also actively retiring their remaining 30 customers. With this in mind, stormwater has the potential to play a critical role in nourishing the canal's vegetation.

On October 27, 2025, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) expressed their interest and general support for creating a program to reduce flood risk and safely add new direct stormwater connections to the Canal where appropriate. To responsibly fulfill this role, staff has identified the need to create a HLC Stormwater Program consisting of 3 pillars: 1.) criteria & modeling; 2.) policy; and 3.) operational implementation.

To move forward on identifying potential canal criteria and policies (pillars 1 & 2), the Mile High Flood District (MHFD) has offered to use remaining funds from the Stormwater Transition and Management Plan (STAMP) effort to convene and facilitate discussions among partners. While it is the hope that the remaining funds will be sufficient to provide direction on various criteria and policy items, the scope of the consultant's work has not been developed as of this briefing. Staff will need to play an

active role, alongside MHFD, in developing the consultant's scope, setting agendas and participating in meetings. Once this work concludes (perhaps fall 2026?), criteria and policy recommendations, along with any deviations or alternatives staff might suggest, will come before the Board of County Commissioners for approval.

This work will ultimately inform the operational implementation (pillar 3) aspect of the program. Additional staff, expertise, office space, and potential IT solutions may be needed to review requests to release new flows into the canal, permit such flows and ensure proper enforcement is in place to protect surrounding landowners. The extent of additional county resources needed to perform these roles is unknown at this time and will be shaped by the magnitude of criteria and policies developed and the potential role of partners.

Alternatives: Approve or modify staff's approach to developing a Stormwater Program. Alternatively, the Board of County Commissioners could decide no new direct stormwater connections should be allowed into the canal which could simplify, depending on how 'new stormwater' is defined, the need for a HLC Stormwater Management Program.

Fiscal Impact: In the short term, existing staff can participate and contribute to MHFD's facilitated process to develop recommended criteria and policies if the deadline for the project is January 1, 2027. In the long term, costs are unknown but funding will likely be needed to appropriately staff and resource the operational implementation aspect of the program, operations/maintenance, and capital improvement program of a HLC Stormwater Management Program. The size and magnitude of the Program is highly dependent on what the program looks like, roles/responsibilities of partners, and risk mitigation - all of which is part of the framework and what will be defined by the work being proposed.

Alignment with Strategic Implementation Strategies: The attached framework helps Arapahoe County institutionalize values-based, transparent decision-making, documenting how we make decisions and carry out actions to achieve the county's strategic plan.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends partnering with MHFD to facilitate discussion and develop, in collaboration with partners, potential criteria and policies for the HLC. Staff also recommends that the BOCC approves the three pillar approach to the HLC Stormwater Program that the County will need to execute its new ownership responsibility. The timeframe from which to accomplish this is January 1, 2027.

Concurrence: Mile High Flood District