



City of Littleton Open Space Task Force Report to City Council

March 2019

Task Force Objective

The Littleton City Council is the intended audience of this report. This document builds on the earlier 2012 Open Space & Parks report by: synthesizing the plans and studies of the last seven years; providing recommendations; and submitting a project list for consideration by Council. The report is organized to provide those outcomes in as brief and simple a document as possible. The report draws from the excellent work of numerous agencies and collaborative efforts. Interested individuals should consult these more in-depth studies and planning processes as needed.

Task Force Members

- Mike Braaten, Deputy Executive Director, South Suburban Parks and Recreation
- Debbie Brinkman, Mayor of the City of Littleton
- Hillary Merritt, Senior Project Manager, The Trust for Public Land
- Bill Nagel, Littleton business owner
- Keith Reester, Public Works Director for the City of Littleton
- Josh Tenneson, Grants Manager for Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program

Consultant

Will Singleton, Singleton Strategies

I. Introduction

The City of Littleton receives funding from the voter approved Arapahoe County Open Spaces sales tax as part of “share back”. This funding can be used for specific purposes (described below) related to increasing open space, connectivity, and recreational amenities for Littleton’s citizens. In 2011, the Littleton City Council (Council) convened a task force to help it prioritize parcel acquisition using these funds. The Littleton Open Space & Parks Task Force delivered a report to Council in March 2012, which included a prioritized list of projects and guidance on future decision-making.

Since that time, numerous planning processes have demonstrated a need to spend funds on more than parcel acquisition, such as developing or renewing parks and building and improving trails. The studies and plans also highlight opportunities to improve connectivity among the parks and trails and with Littleton’s population centers. In August 2018, the Council asked that a new task force be organized to develop the criteria for prioritization of a wider array of projects and to update the report to reflect the developments of the last seven years, including the numerous studies and plans that have been conducted.

While use of the share back funds must adhere to the terms of the referendum that voters passed in 2013, Littleton has a relatively wide set of options. These funds can be used for acquisitions for open space and parks, development of recreational amenities, trails, connectivity, and even environmental education. A portion of the funds can also be used for management, maintenance and administration.

Council asked that the planning include consideration of use of Arapahoe County Open Space sales tax proceeds (in the form of “share back”) and revenue from the Conservation Trust Fund. Both are important resources that have enabled Littleton to leverage additional funds and accomplish impressive acquisitions and improvements. Continued revenue from these sources drives continued thinking about how to maximize the opportunity the funding brings for the citizens of the city.

Six individuals were asked to participate as Task Force members. These individuals were chosen because of their work for relevant agencies, their expertise in recreation planning, and because of their knowledge of Littleton and its needs. Two of the members were on the 2011/2012 Task Force as well. The Task Force members are:

- Mike Braaten, Deputy Executive Director, South Suburban Parks and Recreation
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The Task Force process has included six meetings from September 2018 through January 2019. Will Singleton of Singleton Strategies has facilitated the process and worked with LTF members to draft the report. The objectives of the meetings were to build a common understanding of what a report might say that would be constructive and to develop and review this draft report.

The Task Force also asked two individuals to comment on a draft of this report: Tom Wooten, who is a Littleton-based developer and a member of the first Task Force and Pat Cronenberger who is an active and knowledgeable leader of the South Metro Land Conservancy. They provided helpful feedback that improved the quality of this report.

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II. Synopsis of Existing Plans

A. Plans

The Task Force identified seven studies and planning processes that are most relevant to deciding how to prioritize use of Littleton’s available open space funds and annual share back proceeds that have not been programmed. This section reviews the studies, discusses how they relate to each other, and draws some conclusions. Each of the plans used existing conditions and needs as drivers of their outputs. Littleton’s needs are articulated in each of the plans. The significant studies are:

Name & Date	Sponsoring Agency / Authors	Themes and Notable Outcomes
South Platte River Corridor Vision – 2013	South Platte Working Group / Stream Associates and Partners	<p>Major stakeholder charrette to develop a vision for the South Platte from C-470 to Denver.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan highlighted “quick wins” • Identified projects in habitat improvements, multimodal connectivity, river restoration • Highlighted how to integrate the South Platte into communities through land use and economic development. <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners</u> include Arapahoe County Open Spaces, SSPR, Urban Drainage & Flood Control District, Colorado Water Conservation Board, South Metro Land Conservancy.</p>

		<p><u>What it's good for:</u> Regional cooperation on improving the river corridor as habitat and a community amenity.</p>
Hudson Gardens Master Plan – 2014	Hudson Gardens, SSPR / Alta Planning and Design/ Intergroup Architects	<p>Plan to enhance HG's exhibits and facilities, develop environmental learning opportunities and to improve connectivity to the South Platte/Mary Carter Greenway and the community.</p> <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners</u> include South Suburban Parks & Recreation, Hudson Gardens</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> A focused analysis of how to upgrade and integrate a community resource.</p>
Littleton Open Space, Parks and Trails Master Plan – 2016	City of Littleton / GreenPlay and Partners	<p>Council adopted this comprehensive planning framework in 2016 as the city's authorizing document. It was written drawing from the Task Force report, SP River Corridor Vision and with extensive community engagement. It was written with the intent of informing SSPR on Littleton's priorities for new facilities and service delivery.</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> A complete analysis of potential project opportunities in Littleton that integrates the projects into policy and operational decisions.</p>
SSPRD Master Plan – 2017	SSPR / Design Workshop	<p>Follows from the Littleton Master Plan, the community was engaged to develop this plan that was adopted by the SSPRD Board of Directors as its guide for spending and priority projects. The plan seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve dated facilities and address overcapacity • Leverage investment with municipal and county priorities • Enrich wellness while controlling maintenance and operation costs <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners:</u> South Suburban Parks & Recreation</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> Provides insight into the capital investment priorities of SSPRD. Future service could be influenced by Littleton's funding commitments to different projects in the plan.</p>
Arapahoe County Bike/Ped Master Plan – 2017	Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program / Felsburg Holt & Ullevig	<p>Plan identifies priority capital projects that are eligible for Arapahoe County funds. Littleton was significantly engaged to establish a trail network that serves the city and Arapahoe County.</p> <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners:</u> Arapahoe County Open Spaces</p>

		<p>Program, GOCO has also made connectivity a priority.</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> Provides insight on how Littleton fits into a countywide trail strategy and highlights opportunities to upgrade trails that are at capacity.</p>
High Line Canal Framework Plan – Ongoing	High Line Canal Conservancy Liveable Cities Studio and Partners	<p>A master plan that seeks to broaden use and benefits of the High Line Canal corridor. The plan is being developed with significant input from Littleton and will highlight projects that are eligible for Arapahoe County funding.</p> <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners:</u> Denver Water, Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program, SSPR, High Line Canal Conservancy through the significant private patrons.</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> The planning process is a result of multi-jurisdictional cooperation with Denver Water to identify ways to enhance the canal corridor. Upgrades along the canal trail and adjacent parcels, parks, and trail connectivity will be part of the plan.</p>
South Platte Connections Study	Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program / Felsburg Holt & Ullevig	<p>A study to assess alternatives to enhance east/west connectivity at seven points from C-470 to the Denver City Line. The study includes preliminary design and cost analysis for improving access to the Mary Carter Greenway along Belleview and Mineral.</p> <p><u>Supporting Funding Partners:</u> Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program through the South Platte Working Group</p> <p><u>What it's good for:</u> The preliminary design and budget analyses could help build momentum to address major urban connectivity problems. Arapahoe County has been successful in securing large DRCOG and CDOT capital investments from similar efforts.</p>

B. How the plans relate to each other

Instead of seeing these planning processes as distinct, they should be seen as a building continuum of efforts to vet and prioritize how funding can be used to have the greatest impact. Each of the plans draws on the previous ones; they were each created through extensive outreach and engagement. When considered together, they hold the keys to identifying the priority projects that can be highly leveraged with funding from partner agencies.

C. Key conclusions

The SSPR Master Plan is the policy document for the District. SSPR has committed to pursuing these projects through its budgetary commitments. Shared priorities between Littleton and SSPR will leverage funding and are indicative of strongly justified need. Similarly, Arapahoe County's planning processes also indicate which projects can secure substantial leveraging. Combining the three (projects that can be found across the three jurisdictions' plans) indicates broad support, substantiated need, and strong leveraging capabilities.

In the end, the prioritization of projects likely does not need to be more complicated than simply finding the projects that are echoed through the six plans. They have already been prioritized and they are primed to bring the greatest multiplier for Littleton's available funding. To complement the efforts of the Task Force, Littleton City Staff are compiling the list of projects that are likely to leverage significant funding because of their support by other jurisdictions. This list will be included with this brief report.

Partnering with aligned local, state, federal agencies, developers and non-profit organizations is an essential strategy for Littleton to achieve the big results it seeks with the resources that it has. Many projects are difficult to accomplish, come at significant cost, and require combined efforts, talents and resources. We encourage Council and Littleton City Staff to actively pursue partners as the City commits its own talents and funds.

III. Recommendations and criteria

A. Recommendations on allocating resources

Even if with projects identified that span multiple studies and bring substantial multiplying funds from Littleton's partners, the cost of the priority projects still far exceeds the funds that are currently the City's nest egg.

Projects of different types are hard to compare with each other. How should one prioritize a playground over the purchase of an important parcel or a trail connection? The criteria for evaluating the relative need and opportunities for the projects has already been completed by the six studies but it is a judgment call to spend funds on one type of project over another. Because of this, the Task Force recommends allocating the available resources so that projects can be prioritized among similar opportunities or objectives – apples to apples. The other advantage of this approach is that the priority projects under each objective will be addressed rather than buried by a hot opportunity in a different category.

The Task Force members worked together to develop recommendations on a) how much of the current \$2.3 million in reserves should be held for acquisitions b) what the allocation of funds should be for the remainder and future available funds, and c) what the leveraging expectations should be for the different project types. Members were asked to provide their views on how to allocate available funds and future funds among the different project types.

It should be noted that the allocation amounts are based on the perspectives of the Task Force members. Each of them brings expertise and experience. The input of the individuals on the Task Force was similar and it was not difficult to provide consensus recommended funding levels for this report. The Task Force recommends the following:

Reserve Allocation: Total available funds are \$2.7 million. The Task Force recommends that \$1,000,000 be set aside for acquisition. The remainder of the reserve (\$1.7 million) can go to parks (66% of the remaining) development & renewal and trails (33% of the remaining) development and upgrades.

Annual Income Allocation: Littleton receives roughly \$1,236,000 per year in Arapahoe County Open Space tax share back. Of that amount, \$247,000 are directed to South Platte Park management and other administration, additional funds are added to this total to reach a total annual contribution of \$369,000 (70% operations/30% capital). The Task Force recommends that the residual funds be divided to give parks development and renewal 50% of the remaining funds (around \$500,000), allocate 25% to trail expansion and upgrades (\$250,000), and 25% to accrual of acquisition reserve (\$250,000). Because the annual funding will vary, the Task Force recommends allocating on a percentage basis. So that funding can be “saved up” for larger projects, funding should be held from one year to the next unless there are extenuating circumstances and Council makes a determination that funding should be reprioritized.

B. Other Recommendations:

With the context of consideration projects with different objectives, the Task Force makes the following recommendations to maximize the opportunities with funding that is on hand expected to come from OS shareback.

Recommendation 1: Identifying and moving forward with projects that have declared support of SSPR, AC, and that align with GOCO priorities can maximize the leveraging of available Littleton funds.

Recommendation 2: Projects that include multiple objectives – such as river restoration – have the potential of leveraging additional funding from partners like Urban Drainage or DRCOG.

Recommendation 3: Hold a specific amount of funds for priority parcel purchase opportunities. With the funding held, other funds can be used to meet other needs.

Recommendation 4: While the list of opportunities for acquisition has not changed very much since the 2012 report, new opportunities will present themselves and we recommend that Council and Littleton City Staff be alert and be ready. Maintaining a reserve of funds for acquisitions is important. Building support and a spirit of partnership with leveraging partners is important. Keeping an open mind of the possible source of the opportunity is also important.

Working with developers or taking advantage of the change in brick and mortar retail could be unconventional ways of realizing Littleton's vision for parks, recreation, and connectivity.

If an opportunity comes up and there isn't enough money in reserve, the City should redouble efforts to seek partnerships and consider use of general funds that would be reimbursed over time through the annual share back income. Some have asked whether bonding authority on the annual open space share back proceeds would be an option. For now, the short horizon for the funding (which is up for renewal in just a few years) means that creating a bonding authority would be difficult.

Recommendation 5: Use the projects that have already been identified by the studies and master plans as the portfolio of possible projects because they have already been vetted and prioritized. Then, consider what reflects Littleton interests.

Recommendation 6: There are important trails and connectivity studies that will be completed in the first half of this year. We recommend that Council wait until the end of Summer 2019 to identify and prioritize trail and connectivity projects for funding. Task Force members agreed that the most meaningful outcomes of the studies will likely focus on connections to the High Line Canal Trail.

Two types of trail and connectivity projects will be evident: those that require substantial capital investment but that can have a very large impact and those that are more modest but meet a clear need. We recommend that Council consider balancing these two types of projects.

Recommendation 7: The current authorization of the tax extends for another five years – through 2023. It is expected that a new authorization will be sought to continue this important funding source for recreation and open space in Arapahoe County, but it is possible that voters will not renew the tax. Littleton may want to be proactive in developing other sources of revenue for these purposes from impact fees, land dedication or other means.

Recommendation 8: Littleton's historical practice is to act as a conduit for grant applications to ACOS on behalf of projects affiliated with the city but led by other partners, these include South Suburban Parks & Recreation District, Littleton Public Schools, and Urban Drainage and Flood Control District. ACOS has reduced the annual application cycle to one event limiting the city's total number of grant applications to three. If Council's policy direction is to utilize these grant applications on projects led by the city then moving forward development of a new policy to clearly define applicant relationships with partners is necessary.

Recommendation 9: The 2019 ACOS grant submissions by the City of Littleton are:

1. Harlow Park Renovations and Renewal - \$1,000,000
 - a. COL-\$250,000/SSPR-\$250,000
2. Options Secondary at Whitman and Euclid Middle School Playground Improvements-\$405,600
 - a. COL-\$10,000/LPS-\$51,400
3. Reynolds Landing Phase 2 Design - \$100,000 (COL-\$10,000)

IV. List of projects that flow from the studies and explanation of relevance

Open Space Allocation Recommendations

Open Space Task Force recommendations align with the following potential expenditures.

Allocation and Utilization of Current Reserves

Current Reserve (2019) - \$2,682,201

Utilization	Percentage	Value
Acquisitions	37.5%	\$1,005,825
Parks Development & Renewal	41.25%	\$1,106,408
Trails & Trail Connections	21.25%	\$569,968

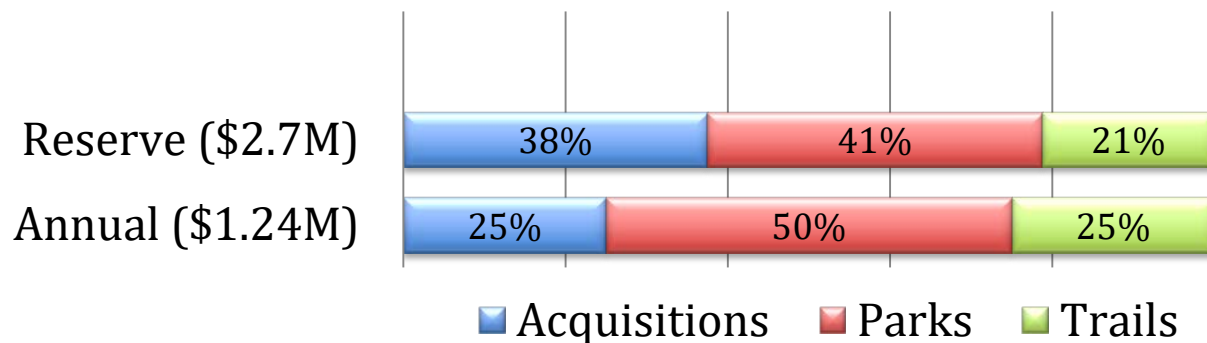
Allocation & Utilization of Future ACOS Allocations

Arapahoe County Open Space Annual Allocation (2020) - \$1,236,000

20% of annual revenues received are directed to South Platte Park and other administration costs. The remaining annual amounts would be allocated as indicated below.

Utilization	Percentage	Value
Acquisitions	25%	\$250,00
Parks Development & Renewal	50%	\$200,000
Trails & Trail Connections	25%	\$250,000

Task Force Allocation Recommendations



Project Priority Lists

PARKS DEVELOPMENT & RENEWAL

The currently adopted City of Littleton Open Space and Trails Master Plan and the South Suburban Parks & Recreation District Master Plan outline the projects in the category for the next 5 years.

South Platte Park: Allow for maximum utilization of 20% for operations and maintenance to be allocated off the top annually. There will be additional capital investments that will need to be considered for new facilities and maintenance/expansion of existing facilities

Project	Cost (Littleton Share)	Total Project Cost	Year
Harlow Park Tennis Courts, Shelter Ballfields	\$250,000	\$1,000,000*	2019
Hamlet Park Playground, Shelter, Basketball Court and Trail Replacement- (Designed)	\$225,000	\$450,000	2020
Writer's Vista Restroom and Shelter- (Designed)	\$100,000	\$600,000	2020
Berry Park Playground Expansion/Replacement - Design	\$18,000	\$36,000	2020
Ida Park Playground Replacement - Design	\$7,000	\$14,000	2020
Southbridge Park Ball Fields, Playground Shelter - Design	\$40,000	\$80,000	2020
Major Trail Wayfinding (In Trails Section)		*	2020/2021
Berry Park Playground Expansion/Replacement - Construction	\$175,000	\$350,000	2021
Ida Park Playground Replacement - Construction	\$50,000	\$100,000	2021
Southbridge Park Ball Fields, Playground Shelter – Construction	\$115,000	\$680,000	2021
Future Projects TBD - Design	\$100,000	\$200,000	2022
Future Projects TBD - Construction	\$500,000	\$1,000,000	2022

*In these projects the city of Littleton is the agency seeking the primary grant from ACOS)

TRAILS & TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Recommendation: Develop a detailed priority list after the completion of the following plans (2019) Transportation Master Plan, E/W Connectivity, Highline Canal Master Plan.

- The Highline Master Plan is not due to be completed until late-2019
- The E/W Connectivity Study is not due to be completed until late-2019
- City of Littleton Transportation Master Plan – October 2019

Highline Canal Access - This is identified as a critical priority in all plans.

SSPR Master Plan targets 2020 & 2021 for Major Trail Wayfinding

- 2020 – Design: COL \$35,000/SSPR \$35,000
- 2021 – Construction: COL \$150,000/SSPR \$150,000/ACOS \$300,000
- SSPR Bond has \$100,000 in 2021 and 2023 for Highline Canal Access in Littleton

ACQUISITIONS

The 2012 Open Space Task Force List is still valid with updates. The City Council should take a measured approach to acquire key parcels if/when they become available.

OTHER ISSUES OF NOTE

Reynolds Landing Phase 2 Designs and Construction River Projects 5-Year Plan

(These have not been allocated to any of the 4 categories may fall into Trails or Acquisitions)

<i>UDFCD Estimate</i>	<i>Design</i>		<i>Construction (Estimate)</i>		
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Funding Source					
UDFCD South Platte Capital Funds	\$600,000	\$800,000	\$800,000		
City of Littleton, Open Space funds	\$100,000	\$200,000	\$500,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
SSPR	\$0	\$100,000	\$500,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Arapahoe County Open Space/ planning grant(10% match)	\$90,000	\$90,000			
Arapahoe County Open Space/standard grant (25% match)					

Arapahoe County Open Space/Joint Grant (50% match)			\$2,000,000		
CWCB grant				\$500,000	
GOCO grant			\$350,000		
Annual Subtotal	\$790,000	\$1,190,000	\$4,150,000	\$800,000	\$300,000
Cumulative Total Raised	\$1,493,579	\$2,683,579	\$6,833,579	\$7,633,579	\$7,933,579

Superchi Property (Currently Unfunded)

The City of Littleton formally took possession in July 2019. No plans, designs, or uses have been identified at this time. Staff discussions with COL, SSPR, ACOS, and UDFCD have discussed adding the design considerations and public engagement on the future of the Superchi property to the existing contract for Reynolds Landing Phase 2, estimated fee \$100,000 - \$150,000.

Hudson Gardens (Currently Unfunded)

Hudson Gardens Strategic Plan currently targets \$1,290,000 in improvements from 2019-2023. Of that total SSPR Hudson Gardens has proposed City of Littleton participation of \$350,000 for Phase 1 River Integration Construction. Due to the revenue producing nature of some of Hudson Gardens' projects a detailed analysis of Littleton Open Space funds participation is necessary on all proposed projects.

Neighborhood Park Connectivity and ADA (Currently Unfunded)

The 2018 City of Littleton ADA Assessment, SSPR ADA Assessments and the Transportation Master Plan will likely show significant deficiencies in neighborhood park access, such as sidewalks, ADA ramps, and pedestrian and bicycle safety issues surrounding many neighborhood facilities, the extents of these costs are still to be determined.

Leveraging

Leveraging is a crucial strategy for maximizing the benefit of these funds. The Task Force recommends that new trails, parks and acquisitions should be leveraged at a rate of two dollars for every Littleton dollar (2:1). Upgrades and replacements should bring 1:1 leveraging. This would bring enable \$4.5 million in acquisitions and from \$5 million to \$7.5 million for parks and trails.

The Task Force recommends that projects for each spending category should come from the vetted studies and master plans. Littleton staff has developed the list of projects that would be eligible under each category.

City of Littleton
Open Space Fund
2017-2023 Financial Projections

Proforma based on Open Space Task Allocation Recommendations

	Estimated 2018	Projected 2019	Projected 2020	Projected 2021	Projected 2022	Projected 2023	Total 2019-2023
Available at 01/01/XX	\$ 2,343,181	\$ 2,472,931	\$ 2,682,201	\$ 3,021,970	\$ 3,036,461	\$ 3,771,350	
Revenues							
Arapahoe County Open Space revenues	\$ 1,128,976	\$ 1,200,000	\$ 1,236,000	\$ 1,273,080	\$ 1,311,272	\$ 1,350,611	\$ 7,499,939
Jefferson County Open Space revenues	92,695	93,000	94,860	96,757	98,692	100,666	576,671
Arapahoe County Grant	-	1,631,950	500,000	750,000	-	-	2,881,950
Interest Earnings	47,672	30,000	43,536	48,973	49,205	60,963	280,348
Rental Income	7,343	7,500	7,725	7,957	8,195	8,441	47,162
Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	\$ 1,276,686	\$ 2,962,450	\$ 1,882,121	\$ 2,176,767	\$ 1,467,365	\$ 1,520,681	\$ 11,286,070
Projects							
A) Parks Development							
1) South Platte Park	\$ 222,651	\$ 197,526	\$ 247,200	\$ 254,616	\$ 262,254	\$ 270,122	\$ 1,454,369
2) Parks Development and Renewal	743,572	1,877,654	945,000	840,000	150,000	50,000	4,606,226
B) Trails & Trail Connections	90,713	585,000	235,000	950,000	200,000	200,000	2,260,713
C) Aquisitions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
D) Other	90,000	93,000	115,153	117,659	120,221	122,840	658,874
Subtotal	\$ 1,146,936	\$ 2,753,180	\$ 1,542,353	\$ 2,162,275	\$ 732,476	\$ 642,962	\$ 8,980,182
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 2,472,931	\$ 2,682,201	\$ 3,021,970	\$ 3,036,461	\$ 3,771,350	\$ 4,649,069	
Reserve							
A) Parks Development		\$ 1,106,408	\$ 1,155,808	\$ 1,275,040	\$ 1,649,549	\$ 2,139,793	
B) Trails & Trail Connections		569,968	582,168	186,784	249,038	319,160	
C) Aquisitions		1,005,825	1,253,025	1,507,641	1,769,896	2,040,018	
D) Other		-	30,968	66,996	102,867	150,097	
Ending Reserves		\$ 2,682,201	\$ 3,021,970	\$ 3,036,461	\$ 3,771,350	\$ 4,649,069	