City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Plains Conservation Center
May 15th, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brad Stratton, Joy DeMots, Bob Hunchberger, Mark Christopher, David Bourne, Dennis Roy

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bob Gemmill

STAFF PRESENT: Brian Green, Deputy Director of Operations, Parks, Open Space, and Forestry; Joy Thompson, Natural Resources Supervisor; Lauren Morales, Management Assistant; Gabriel Narez, Administrative Specialist

VISITORS PRESENT: Wayne Gallagher, Jenai Rutledge

I. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 5:32 PM.

II. WELCOME: Brad Stratton welcomed everyone to the May 2024 OSB meeting and welcomed guests Wayne Gallagher and Jenai Rutledge. Brad introduced Gabriel Narez, who will be filling in for Lauren Morales as the OSB liaison this summer. He also welcomed back Bob Hunchberger, who was absent from the board for several months due to a health issue. Brad then asked the OSB members to introduce themselves.

III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Mark Christopher moved to approve the agenda. Bob Hunchberger seconded the motion. Motion carried.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Joy DeMots moved to approve the March 2024 OSB minutes. David Bourne seconded the motion. Motion carried.

V. MANAGEMENT REMARKS: Brian introduced himself to Jenai Rutledge and shared some about his role. He has been with the city for 16 years and shared his past roles up until now. Brian is working to fill two positions- Manager of Parks Operations and Manager of Open Space and Forestry. Joy T. shared some about her position as well. She has been with the city for 18 years and currently manages the naturalist program. Brad commented that the naturalist team is incredible at what they do.

VI. NEW BUSINESS: The OSB members interviewed Jenai Rutledge for an opening on the OSB. The board members held a discussion regarding the candidate. David Bourne motioned to recommend Ms. Rutledge for appointment to the OSB. Dennis Roy seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

The board members discussed the conservation easement site monitoring assignments. Currently, no one is assigned to the Star K Ranch site and Mark is the only one assigned to Triple Creek, while David does not yet have an assigned site. Wayne asked if citizens could help with conservation easement monitoring. Brian responded that they can. Wayne mentioned that he is most familiar with the Star K area and could assist with monitoring there. Brad offered to help with Star K as well. That particular site has lots of walking and backtracking and is overall a tough site. The OSB members agreed on new site assignments.

- Buckley Buffer Open Space Complex- Dennis Roy & Brad Stratton
- Coal-Senac Open Space- Bob Hunchberger, Joy DeMots, & Bob Gemmill
- Star K Ranch Open Space Complex- Jenai Rutledge & Brad Stratton
- Triple Creek Open Space Complex- David Bourne & Mark Christopher
Brad explained the bullet points process and the OSB members decided on new assignments for bullet points.

- Mayor Coffman- Brad Stratton
- Ward I (CM Murillo)- Dennis Roy
- Ward II (CM Sundberg)- Dennis Roy
- Ward III (CM Medina)- Brad Stratton
- Ward IV (CM Hancock)- David Bourne
- Ward V (CM Lawson)- Jenai Rutledge
- Ward VI (CM Bergan)- Mark Christopher
- CM Gardner- Joy DeMots
- CM Jurinsky- Bob Hunchberger
- CM Coombs- Mark Christopher
- CM Zvonek- Bob Gemmill

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Brad asked the OSB members if they are interested in sponsoring a weekend cleanup event. Currently, all planned cleanups are scheduled for weekdays. The topic has come up at prior meetings but with so much going on, it has continuously been tabled. Mark asked what sponsoring a weekend cleanup would entail. Brad responded that the OSB members would lead the cleanup and would determine the site, route, date, and logistics for the event. PROS staff member Fendi Despres would put the information on the city website. At least some OSB members would also need to participate in the cleanup event on the day of to lead and coordinate the volunteer teams. Brad reminded the OSB members that they had assisted city staff with a December cleanup event and were meant to help with Earth Day cleanup, which unfortunately was cancelled due to snow. David commented that city staff seems to know the sites well and could perhaps provide a location recommendation. Brian commented that there are hundreds of sites that could work for a cleanup event. Brad added that the board would need to consider the ease of access and parking. While there are plenty of riparian areas with trash, many do not have spaces for people to park and meet. If there is interest from the board in leading a weekend cleanup event, they could start investigating and discussing potential sites. Dennis asked what kind of turnout Fendi generally sees from the weekday cleanup events. David answered that there were roughly 20 volunteers last time. Brad added that different people seem to attend each time as well, sometimes including families. Mark suggested that the board keep thinking about the idea for now. Due to current vacancies, it may be hard for enough OSB members to commit. Mark asked how many members of the OSB would need to come. Brian replied that about 2-3 people would be needed to run it, and that each participating board member could lead a group of volunteers. Staff cannot do cleanup events on weekends, so the board members would take on the roles that staff usually handle during the weekday cleanup events. Jenai asked if there is any age limit for participation. Brian and Brad responded that there is not. Jenai shared that she has two boys and could probably gather many interested folks as volunteers. Mark suggested that the idea be tabled until after summer. Many of the board members travel and are very busy in the summer, but September or October could be an option. David asked if city staff have lists of suggestions. Brian replied that staff can absolutely help with planning, and mainly need people to lead the event on the day of. Brad mentioned that a fellow parent at a weekday cleanup event had asked why the cleanups are never held on the weekend. Brad asked Fendi and she mentioned that it would be possible if the board were willing to lead it, which is how the idea came about. Brad stated that the topic could remain on the agenda for future discussion for now.

VIII. REPORTS: Brad announced that it is already the second quarter of the year for conservation easement monitoring. He asked if everyone made it out to their assigned sites during the first quarter of the year. Most everyone had. Brad commented that it is currently a nice time of the year to go out, and reminded the board members that second quarter monitoring should be completed by the end of June.
Joy D. mentioned that the parking area at Coal-Senac is gated off, but she wasn’t sure why. Brian answered that a big sewer line was being installed there but was not sure who put up the gate. Brian asked if the gate was right by the road. Joy D. answered that it was. Brad asked if there could be a new entrance. Joy D. replied that she didn’t think that was the case. She can park up the way a bit, but it is hard to access the photo posts. Brian replied that there should still be access there. Joy D. offered to go by the site again to check. Brad mentioned that he would be participating in the Weed Warrior Day on Friday and offered to let Brian know if the gate is up or not.

Brad asked if the Outreach Education subcommittee had had an opportunity to meet since the last OSB meeting. Mark and Joy D. reported that they had discussed various ideas. Bob G. had made a suggestion that in certain areas, the board members could have a table to hand stuff out, rather than a formal presentation. Mark added that the subcommittee would like to explore ways to be more involved with the city through existing city events. Many of the attendees of the city ward meetings were already fairly informed about open space. The hope is to also be able to reach a younger and more diverse audience. Mark added that the Polar Plunge event was a great success in that respect. The subcommittee thinks it would be a good idea to continue to explore other similar events. Brad agreed and mentioned the upcoming Colorado Remembers event on May 25th. If the board was interested in participating, they could share a booth with city naturalists. Mark asked what time the event would take place. Joy Thompson stated that the event runs from 7:30am-11:00am and is hosted by the Colorado Freedom Memorial Foundation. Brad asked if staff members Toi and Emma would be at the event. Joy T. confirmed they would. Brad mentioned that just one or two board members at a time would be sufficient to help man the booth. Mainly they would be helping and giving out information about the OSB. Joy T. shared that the naturalist booth will have a theme, but that the OSB could have a separate table to talk about the board. Brad added that the OSB table could promote nearby open spaces as well. Brian commented that the location of the event is great, with Sand Creek nearby. Mark asked if the board could get back to Brad on participating. Brad said that he would need to know soon, and Dennis added that the event was a week from Saturday. Joy D. asked where the event was being held. Brian responded that it was being held at Memorial Park, which is near Beck Recreation Center. Joy D. replied that she could volunteer for an hour or two. David said he might be able to participate, and Mark said he could let Brad know that week. Bob H. added that he might be interested as well. Brad shared that he could probably do the early shift, as the event only goes until 11:00am. Joy T. suggested two shifts, one from 8:00am-9:30am, and one from 9:30am-11:00am. Brad agreed to do the first shift and Joy D. and Bob H. agreed to do the second shift. Brad mentioned that the next event after Colorado Remembers is the Pollinator event. That would be a particularly great event for the board to participate in. Jenai asked where that event would be. Joy T. shared that it will be held at the Waterwise garden at the Aurora Municipal Center. The event will involve a proclamation and will have lots of booths and activities. It is being run by staff member David Footle, who is very passionate about pollinators. Joy shared that the Pollinator event will be from 10am-2:00pm on June 22nd, and that most of the naturalist staff would be there. Brad asked the OSB members if they would like to have a booth at the Pollinator event. The board members agreed. Joy T. offered to let David know that the OSB would like to have a booth. Joy D. also shared that Bob H. would be joining the Outreach Education subcommittee and added that he was the brains behind the project in the first place.

Brad shared that Lauren Morales had received some new information from the Clerk’s office and asked Lauren to share. While interviews do not have to be held at official advisory board meetings and the interview panel does not have to consist of the entire board (or even a majority), interviews must be publicly announced at least 24 hours in advance and open to the public. An earlier interview of candidate Jenai Rutledge had not been noticed to the public, which was why the board had to interview Ms. Rutledge at the May OSB meeting. Additionally, any planned meetings of three or more advisory board members where official business would be discussed must be announced to the public as well. This would not apply to cleanup events or outreach presentations but would apply to meetings that the Outreach Education subcommittee held. For those meetings, a Notice of Potential Quorum
would need to be posted to the city website at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, and would need to contain the meeting time, date, and location details. The board members discussed the impact of this policy. Brian suggested that the subcommittee could meet directly prior to the OSB meetings, and that the pre-meeting details could be included on the meeting agenda. The OSB members liked this idea and agreed that it might be a good option for further subcommittee meetings.

Brad asked how the Polar Plunge event went. David shared that one visitor was disappointed that the board did not actually kill the animals that they had display pelts for. Joy D. shared that both kids and adults alike had such a great time at the event. Brad added that it was very windy that day, so the booth was a little crammed. Everyone was huddled together due to the cold. The event is usually held in February and that may have been better timing this year. Jenai commented that she had attended the event with her family. It was their first plunge event. They might not ever plunge but certainly would not consider it in February. Mark shared that the day before the plunge it was 70 degrees, but the day of was 30 degrees and windy. Brad shared that his son didn’t go underwater this year and was just in and out. It was a fun event despite the poor weather. If the weather was better the booth likely would have seen more participation. Dennis added that it was a good exercise in flexibility, as they moved the booth to a less windy spot. Mark thanked Brad for organizing everything and getting the OSB a booth and added that the OSB should definitely participate in more events. Brad mentioned the 7/20 Reflections on Tap event coming up in the summer. The naturalists will not be attending that event, but a couple of OSB members did it last year and thought it was great. Wayne agreed. It was a great time, and they had a blast participating. Brad thanked Joy T. for providing the OSB with materials. Everyone came by to check out the booth thanks to the props they had.

IX. CHAIR REMARKS: Brad shared that he recently participated in a workday at Pronghorn Natural Area. Volunteers added two more monitoring posts, both further down over the ridge. Several weeks prior, a group of volunteers went to Aurora Reservoir and cut some willow sprigs for planting. The sprigs were allowed to soak for a few weeks and then planted at Pronghorn Natural Area. They are now growing and leafing out and have chicken wire around them to protect them while they grow. Brian shared that he is so proud of everyone who participated in the project. At a past event, volunteers planted 600 willows at Pronghorn Natural Area. Unfortunately, the following three years saw a severe drought, and the deer were very hungry. Only 6-8 of the original willow trees now remain. Brad shared that the volunteers did not put chicken wire around all of the willows they planted. Part of the project will be to observe if the wire helps to improve outcomes for the willows. There is also a lot of beaver activity out there now. Bryon Shipley found a new beaver area and a new pond out toward the west of the property. The beavers built a dam there so the pond has expanded and contains leopard frogs. Volunteers have focused two of the trail cameras on beaver dams in the area. They have also installed posts to hold the cameras instead of hanging the cameras from trees. Brian asked if they got any good photos recently. Brad shared that they have. They also saw a beaver today, though very briefly. Wildlife sightings included chorus frogs, mule deer, great blue herons, a great-horned owl, many raccoons and deer, and four harriers (1 male and 3 females). It was a fantastic day, and a lot was accomplished. The next event at Pronghorn is a BioBlitz event on June 1st. There will be two time slots, one from 7:30am-10:30am, and one from 6pm-9pm. The idea is to bring a chair, sit, set up a camera, and just see what happens. Jenai asked what the goal of the BioBlitz is and if it is to survey various species. Brad responded that the goal is to just to discover what wildlife is currently out there. He feels that they are really making a difference at Pronghorn. Brian shared the history of the site. The city of Aurora acquired the property from the city of Denver. Prior to the acquisition, it was a sewer sludge site. The area is a riparian corridor but had been heavily grazed and is still a very challenged site. The riparian corridor is somewhat intact, and a few areas were not level enough to dump on. Sewer sludge was dumped over and over across many acres. Due to the dumping, the soil still contains very high nitrates and other chemicals. Jenai mentioned an article on 9News about another site with high levels of forever chemicals. Brian explained that this site still contains compounds such as arsenic. Over the years, staff and volunteers have tried many projects to restore the area. Not much grows there except for weeds, and the few successes they have had would be very
expensive projects to scale up across the entire site. Currently the wetlands are being left to their own
devices. Where staff can, they are restoring the property and trying to control noxious weeds. On the
other side of Quincy, when the city constructed the Binney Water Purification Facility, there was a lot
of excess material. About 3-6 feet of soil was placed on top of the property and the area was then
seeded with native grasses. The native grasses are well-supported there at fill area A, and it looks like
native landscape. David asked if there was any soil overfill on the North side of Quincy. Brian said
there was not. Brad added that the dividing lines are very visible. Brian shared that while it presents
many challenges still, Pronghorn Natural Area is an interesting site. Many animals are seen on the
property, including coyotes, pronghorn, mule deer, and various other native species. Brad also shared
that the next city cleanup event will be held on June 11th at Westerly Creek, starting from Utah Park.

X. BULLET POINTS:
- The Board interviewed and approved a candidate to fill one of the two open OSB positions.
- The Board agreed to help the naturalist team staff a booth at the Colorado Remembers event on May
  25th and to have its own booth at the Aurora Pollinator Festival on June 22nd to promote visiting and
  volunteering in the open spaces of Aurora.
- The Board continued the discussion of sponsoring a natural area trash clean up in the fall.

XI. MEMBER COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION:
- Dennis- Reported that he completed the Buckley Buffer conservation easement monitoring in
  March. His family is thinking of converting their yard to xeriscaping as a summer project. Brian
  asked if they would be getting a grant from the city for the yard conversion. Dennis replied that
  they are hoping to. The grant deadline is this month, and they need to settle on a design, look at
  the budget, and commit. The kids’ schedules are also very busy.
- David- Participated in a recent trash pickup event and was amazed at just how many golf balls
  were found. He ended up talking to a fellow volunteer at the event and thought a business card
  for the OSB would be useful to have to hand out. Brian asked Joy T. if staff still have any
  business cards. Joy agreed to check. David also participated in a bird count that morning and
  saw lots of wildflowers already popping up.
- Joy D.- Really appreciated the emails Fendi has been sending out with a notification of
  upcoming events. Joy commented that she liked the business card idea and is looking forward to
  the summer months and warmer weather. Things look really clean and nice out at Horseshoe
  Park. Brian commented that there are a lot of recurring unhoused camps there. The area has to be
  cleaned after each abatement, which might be why it looks so nice. Joy commented that the
  encampments might have moved under the nearby bridge. Brian asked if Joy saw any
  construction at Horseshoe Park. Joy said she did, and Brian explained that the playground was in
  the process of being renovated.
- Mark- Reported that he always sees a lot of people sharing nature photos on the Nextdoor app.
  Mark reached to one gentleman who always posts beautiful nature photos and talked to him
  about the OSB. Mark asked if he could invite the citizen to a future board meeting. Brian replied
  that he definitely can, as all advisory board meetings are open to the public. Mark shared that
  others had commented as well and was wondering if he should follow up with any of the
  commenters. Brad replied that he certainly can. Brian said that Mark could decide based on his
  own personal judgement. Mark replied that he doesn’t know the commenters but might pursue
  that. David asked if Mark had provided the link to apply to the OSB and Mark confirmed he had.
  Mark added that Red-Tailed Hawk Park is currently a mess due to construction and a recent fire.
  The building that was being constructed has now been moved further back from the nearby open
  space. The park is very popular, and many people walk their dogs there, including off-leash.
  Jenai asked if signs could be put up to let people know that prairie dogs are the only source of
  plague in Colorado and could infect dogs. Mark replied that it would likely not help. He
  mentioned seeing a poodle off-leash and telling the owner about the risks of prairie dog bites or
  rattlesnakes. The owner did not care. The builders are doing a good job around the playground
  areas and are making sure to gather the trash caused by the construction. Brian commented that
the division is seeing fewer staff vacancies, which is very helpful. There was a 40% vacancy at one point during COVID. Mark asked why it is that staff cut the grass along trail edges. Brian replied that citizen complaints are the main reason.

- Bob H- Commented that he was happy to be here and to be attending OSB meetings again. Bob shared details of the hemorrhagic stroke he suffered in 2023.
- Jenai- Commented that she was happy to be done with school and that her kids would be out for the summer next Wednesday.

Due to weather concerns, the May OSB meeting site was moved from Ponderosa Preserve to Plains Conservation Center. Brad asked the OSB members if they would prefer to hold the June OSB at Ponderosa Preserve, or to keep the meeting sites as planned. The OSB members decided to keep the meeting sites as planned. Brian commented that he may be unable to make the June OSB meeting. Joy T. said she would be able to attend.

XII. ADJOURN: Dennis Roy moved to adjourn. David Bourne seconded the motion. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 7:02pm.

The next meeting will be on June 18th at 5:30 PM at Plains Conservation Center.
"5-15-24 OSB Minutes (DRAFT)" History

Document created by Gabriel Narez (gnarez@auroragov.org)
2024-07-12 - 5:44:49 PM GMT

Document emailed to stratb@aol.com for signature
2024-07-12 - 5:45:14 PM GMT

Email viewed by stratb@aol.com
2024-07-13 - 3:20:01 AM GMT

Signer stratb@aol.com entered name at signing as Brad Stratton
2024-07-13 - 3:20:25 AM GMT

Document e-signed by Brad Stratton (stratb@aol.com)
Signature Date: 2024-07-13 - 3:20:27 AM GMT - Time Source: server

Agreement completed.
2024-07-13 - 3:20:27 AM GMT