



City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD

Tuesday, September 22, 2020

5:30 P.M.

Webex Meeting

Public Dial-In: 1-720-650-7664

Event/Access Code: 146-596-6129

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Victoria Samuel, Vice Chair Suzy Cress, Wayne Gallagher, Lee Lindholm, Tom Isaacson, Brad Stratton, Mark Christopher, Bob Hunchberger, Steve Kennedy

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Pat Schuler, Manager of Open Space and Natural Resources (OSNR); Brian Green, Superintendent of Open Space and Natural Resources (OSNR), Joy Thompson, Lead Naturalist (OSNR), Suzie Jaquith, Administrative Supervisor.

VISITORS PRESENT: None

- I. **CALLED TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Samuel at 5:38 P.M.
- II. **WELCOME GUESTS:** Manager Schuler welcomed Brian Green, Joy Thompson and the Open Space Board members.
- III. **GUEST SPEAKERS:**
 - a. Brian Green, OSNR Superintendent, gave a slideshow presentation on Confluence Open Space Restoration Project and operations of the Aurora Reservoir.
Confluence Open Space Restoration Project: This 60-acre property, located at the confluence of Coal Creek and Murphy Creek, just north of Buckley Airforce Base, immediately east of Coal Creek Arena, has been a sand and gravel mine since about 1979. City acquired the property using mostly grant funding. Staff are preparing a reclamation plan to restore this property into a natural open space. The goal is to naturalize the site for the benefit of wildlife which is quite diverse. An underwater survey was done to determine the depth of the ponds. Areas of the property will be graded, softened and re-seeding with natural vegetation. Staff is working with an engineering contractor and landscape architect consultants to develop the property into a pristine, open space natural area. Construction is scheduled to start July 2021. Member Gallagher asked if there were any immediate plans for the additional space to the south of the property. Brian responded that the Triple Creek alignment is in the proposed plan, but for right now it serves as buffer property.
 - b. Aurora Reservoir: The Pandemic hit right before the opening of the season. Staff worked hard to create a re-opening plan that would allow for limited recreation opportunities at the reservoir. Staff had to find creative ways to social distance such as positioning cones on the beach to direct patrons and reducing the number of vehicles

allowed into the park by 50%. Walk-in visitors through the six access gates doubled this summer compared to last summer. In March, there were nearly 15,000 walk-in visitors and that trend continued into August. There was a total of 557,000 visitors through August which surpassed the 555,000 visitors in all of 2019. Revenue is not showing the same trends due to limiting the parking lot to 50% which equates to less vehicle/entry passes being sold. Entry fees were stopped in April and May during the pandemic which also reduced revenue. In June, after being approved to open again at half capacity and again charging entry fees, the reservoir started to recover some of the revenue lost. Total revenue brought in through August this year is \$645,000 compared to the average of close to \$1,000,000 brought in through August during a typical year. Member Hunchberger thanked staff for re-opening efforts of the Aurora Reservoir – he was able to enjoy some paddle boarding. Chair Samuel asked if the slideshow presentation could be shared with members. Suzie Jaquith will share via email at the end of the meeting.

- c. Joy Thompson, Lead Natural Resources Specialist, gave a slideshow presentation on the Naturalist Program. The Naturalists provide outreach and educate the community on Aurora's natural resources. There are three nature centers: Morrison Nature Center at Star K Ranch, Plains Conservation Center, and Senac Creek Nature Center at Aurora Reservoir. Generation Wild Programming is a Great Outdoors of Colorado (Goco) grant funded program aimed to get underserved audiences out into nature and open space. Goco conducted a survey and found the biggest reason people were not taking advantage of the programs was because they were not aware of the opportunities offered in their cities. Naturalists help empower citizens through this program by getting them into nature and open spaces within their community and in doing so, inspiring future stewardship interests. The Naturalist Team is part of the Generation Wild Northeast Metro Coalition which works with many different organizations that are also members. Some outreach involved a "boots on the ground" approach where flyers were distributed to target audiences to garner interest. Some outdoor experiences offered include kayaking, stand-up paddle boarding, hiking, biking, nature watching, archery, fishing, and camping. Staff continues to develop different ways to reach out to the community during the pandemic such as the Family Nature Club which gives ideas of ways for families to experience nature and open space together. They also engaged in some virtual programming with the COMPASS program ran through the Recreation division which included a virtual tour of the open space sites in Aurora. In-Person Programming has resumed, following social distancing requirements. So far this year, the Naturalists Team has made 2,475 connections with the community. OSNR Naturalist staff have applied for an extension of the grant through December 10, 2020 and have also applied for the next phase of the grant which would continue into 2023. Currently, staff is busy scheduling programs for the winter. Member Christopher asked if program works with schools. Joy replied yes, they work with Aurora, Cherry Creek and Denver schools but mostly with schools that are in the northwest Aurora area where the grant is focused. Chair Samuel asked if staff was involved with providing virtual learning in the schools. Joy responded staff has provided videos of some their most popular programming for schools to access through the city of Aurora website. They also work with individual teachers as well to provide specific learning opportunities. Member Christopher asked what the possibility was of offering camping next year. Joy responded it is a possibility next year, depending on the pandemic. Member Kennedy asked if the grant provided transportation. Joy replied

normally yes, but during the pandemic, no because of following social distancing guidelines.

IV. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Manager Schuler made a motion to add the Annual Board Report and Member Isaacson made a motion to add the City-Wide Strategic Planning Meeting on Sept 30th to the September Agenda under New Business. Member Christopher motioned to approve the added items under New Business and approve the Agenda and Vice Chair Cress seconded the motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None to approve.

VI. PROS MANAGEMENT REMARKS:

- a. Manager Schuler asked for ideas from members on topics related to open space for future meetings and to have them be added to future meeting Agendas. Members asked for Manager Schuler to reach out to entities involved in fire fighting so that staff could do a presentation on the impact fires can have on open space.

VII. REPORTS: None.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Chair and Vice-Chair Elections were held. Chair Samuels and Vice Chair Cress expressed their interest in running again. Member Gallagher made a motion for Chair Samuel and Vice Chair Cress to continue in their elected positions. Member Stratton seconded the motion. Motion was carried by unanimous vote.
- b. The Annual Open Space Advisory Board Report is due on October 22nd: The report is presented at Parks, Foundation and Quality of Life council policy committee meeting by Manager Schuler and a member of the board. Manager Schuler asked for assistance from members to reflect back on past meetings for content to include in the report. Chair Samuels will attend the meeting as the board member with Manager Schuler. Manager Schuler will send out the written report to board members, once complete for comments.
- c. City-Wide Strategic Planning Meeting on September 30th: City Clerk's Office sent out an invite to all boards and commissions asking for one member to attend this meeting. Vice-Chair Cress will register and attend as the representative for the Open Space Board.

X. OLD BUSINESS:

- a. Manager Schuler asked members if they'd like to go on a tour in the new vehicle at the Plains Conservation Center in between meetings. Members were open to the idea. Member Hunchberger asked if a walk about tour of Confluence Open Space property could be arranged. Manager Schuler was open to the idea and will email the members of ideas after meeting.

- XI. **ISSUES TO CITY COUNCIL:** The group determined this month's bullet points to be sent to their assigned City Council Members.
- a. Annual Open Space Advisory Board Report
 - b. Presentation on the Generation Go Wild Program
 - c. Presentation on Confluence Restoration Project and Aurora Reservoir
- XII. **CHAIR'S REMARKS:** Chair Samuel remarked how good it was to see everyone and that everyone is healthy. She asked about property north of the Highline Canal, west of the Triple Creek Area. There were markings set for excavating. Manager Schuler explained the area was not originally surveyed by the contractor properly and the wrong areas was excavated. To correct, the area was to be filled back in and re-seeded. Chair Samuel commented she noticed cottonwood trees had been planted to replace the ones that were damaged by excavation. Member Christopher asked if smoke from wildfires has impacted open space. Manager Schuler replied there may be potential impacts to bird migration and plant material with the layer of ash.
- XIII. **MEMBER COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION:**
- a. **Member Stratton** – Commented he has walked along Tollgate open space near Horseshoe Park and there seems to always be a large amount of trash. He thanked parks staff for doing their best to keep up with the cleanup.
 - b. **Member Kennedy** – Commented it's been heartening to see Trail and Open Space Stewards welcomed back in and Naturalists resuming programming again. He suggested it would he would like to see invites to the board on some naturist events and programming.
 - c. **Vice Chair Cress** - Reported there are tires dumped in Sand Creek again. Pat responded she will follow up with city staff to have them removed.
 - d. **Member Isaacson** – Suggested Trail Assessments
 - e. **Member Lindholm** - Reported the gate across from Rome St., on the backside of Plains Conservation Center in the buffer area, had been dismantled and someone drove through it. Manager Schuler will follow up with staff.
 - f. **Member Christopher** - Reported he heard report of a mountain lion sighting around Tower and Hampden and wondering if had been reported to staff. Manager Schuler had not heard anything but will follow up.
- XIV. **ADJOURN:** Vice Chair Cress motioned to adjourn. Member Gallagher seconded the motion. Motion carried; meeting adjourned at 7:45 P.M.

The next meeting will be via WebEx on October 27th at 5:30 P.M.

Victoria Samuel, Chair

Suzie Jaquith, Recording Secretary

Victoria Samuel

Suzie Jaquith