

City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Webex Meeting
February 23, 2021

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Steve Kennedy, Bob Hunchberger.

STAFF PRESENT: Pat Schuler, Manager of Open Space and Natural Resources (OSNR); Mike Bonham, Park Ranger Supervisor; Lauren Morales, Administrative Support.

VISITORS PRESENT: None.

CALLED TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order by Victoria Samuel at 5:33 P.M.

- I. WELCOME: Victoria Samuel welcomed everyone to the February meeting and introduced Mike Bonham, a City of Aurora Park Ranger Supervisor.

GUEST SPEAKERS:

- a. Mike Bonham provided an update on the Park Ranger Program to the Board members. He discussed staffing challenges and trainings and mentioned that two ranger staff will be featured in the Aurora Guide, in an article detailing A Day in the Life of a Park Ranger. Other updates Mike discussed included the impact of COVID-19 on attendance and traffic flow, the closure of the swim beach during hours when lifeguards were not present, an increase in illegal swimming due to HOA pools being closed, some challenges with illegal drinking that were resolved with APD support, and increased trail traffic. Mike also spoke a bit about a recent dilemma the ranger team is facing that involves electronic devices. The 2019 Colorado State Statute mandates that escooters be allowed on trails, as well as ebikes. These are listed as a Class 1 device, not capable of going more than 20mph or weighing more than 100lbs. Some other electronic devices, such as hoverboards, are not allowed due to the lack of a handlebar. The staff is struggling with some issues on how to regulate these devices, and whether it should be more about dangerous behaviors (high speeds, powerful devices, reckless driving) or the types of devices.

Vicky Samuel mentioned she had noticed the increase in these devices as well. The small devices do not bother her, but people on atvs and dirt bikes seem more dangerous due to their speed. Mike replied that gas powered vehicles are prohibited so those can be better monitored, and that his team is working with the City Attorney to reword regulations. Tom Isaacson asked how much of an increase has been observed. Mike said he did not have hard numbers, but he would say there has been roughly a 40% increase in ebikes. He also noted that many of these devices are coming in through alternate entrances, mainly from the gates close to residences, and that this issue is system-wide, and not just at the Aurora Reservoir. Tom asked how this compares to Cherry Creek and other similar areas and if they are in communication regarding this issue. Mike mentioned that South Suburban and Bear Creek Park are seeing many increases as well and are changing their regulations to enforce speed limitations rather than by type of device. Brad Stratton suggested speed could be the primary regulation with the type of device as a secondary regulation. Mike said that they have discussed this with APD, but speed regulation presents some challenges on enforcement. Mark Christopher said that while he would not want to be the fun police, as things may continue to get worse the City could consider a ban on all motors. Mike mentioned that the issue with that is that ebikes and escooters must be allowed per the existing state regulations, and he would find it difficult to ban the more harmless devices while still allowing those. The danger of the quietness of these devices was also discussed.

Other updates and issues covered ice fishing at the reservoir, off-leash dog monitoring and enforcement, and camps for people experiencing homelessness. The board members thanked Mike for his presentation.

- II. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA:** Wayne Gallagher motioned to approve the agenda. Tom Isaacson seconded the motion. Motion carried by popular vote.
- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
- **January Minutes** – Suzy Cress motioned to approve the January minutes. Wayne Gallagher seconded the motion. Motion carried by popular vote.
- IV. **PROS MANAGEMENT REMARKS:**
- a. **Compiling Ideas for 2021 OSB Annual Action Plan**
- Pat Schuler sent the board members a copy of the Lincoln Institute document about Open Space Conservation & investing in your community's economic growth. She noted that the Master Plan must wait until after the City's Strategic Plan is completed and the PROS Department's Strategic plan is underway or completed. While having nearby open space is great for developments and property values, developers often try to maximize space and do not usually take great care to preserve nearby open space. The City often negotiates the terms of development with developers to try to preserve open space and irrigated parks. One example Pat covered concerned the Triple Creek corridor. Other benefits included benefits to local wildlife, increased opportunities for bird watching, and carbon offsets, among others. Pat mentioned that this article did a great job of highlighting the economic benefits of preserving open space, and that the City's council members might be interested.
- Tom Isaacson asked which wards would likely be most affected by this. Pat responded that Wards II and VI would likely be most affected, though they all would see some of this issue to some degree. Currently the City is looking at how to revise the requirements of developers, to negotiate how much space must be given for parks and open space. Brad Stratton pointed out that the document was written in 1998 and wanted to know if it was still current and applicable. Pat replied that it is still very viable and relevant today. Similar data can be found on the Trust for Public Land website, though that is more data-heavy and could make the point a little less clear to some. Brad mentioned that he liked all the examples given using specific areas, as well as the points made about water. Pat said that a good example of this was seen at the Confluence Open Space area. In 2013, there was a good amount of flooding at Coal Creek. When the water reached the open space, it spilled into the mines and filled up the ponds there, coming out the other side very clean and much less turbulent. Vicky mentioned that while the site may seem unnatural due to the changes made by past mining, today the area seems conducive to wildlife, positive environmental impacts, and birdfowl. She also liked some of the terminology used in the document. Tom and the other board members thanked Pat for her work on this.
- V. **REPORTS:** None.
- VI. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** OSB members discussed adding the issues with electronic devices and the value of open space to the 2021 Action Plan in some way. Tom mentioned that he would like to see something like an Education Action Plan added in, to help inform the public of these and other issues. Vicky suggested one approach might be to set up a table at a trail head to talk to people face to face. Tom mentioned that he would like to go even further with it and utilize mass media in some way. Pat agreed that this was worthy of discussion, and that it should be added to the 2021 Action Plan.
- VII. **NEW BUSINESS:** None.
- VIII. **OLD BUSINESS:** None.
- IX. **ISSUES TO CITY COUNCIL:**
- Discussed Open Space Conservation Document about investing in community's economic growth.
 - Ranger Mike gave a presentation about the challenges that come with dramatic increase of using our open space and trails- electronic devices on trails/water, new social trails, and swimming in dangerous areas.
 - OSB members have agreed to add increasing public education and awareness to the 2021 Action Plan goals.

- X. CHAIR'S REMARKS: None.
- XI. GUEST COMMENTS: None.
- XII. MEMBER COMMENTS & DISCUSSION:
 - a. **Mark Christopher**- Mentioned that if people were not often hearing back from their assigned Council members, it could be due to the large number of issues on recent Council agendas, rather than poor messaging.
 - b. **Tom Isaacson**- Appreciated the meeting tonight, as he had eye surgery two weeks ago. It was nice to see everyone.
 - c. **Suzy Cress**- Noticed lots of dead trees getting removed at Sand Creek and wanted to know why. Pat mentioned the tree removal was likely being done by either Urban Drainage and Flood Control or the City's Stormwater Department. Although dead trees have tremendous value to wildlife and in open space, they can be the cause of real problems in case of flood.
 - d. **Lee Lindholm**- Wanted to ask if there is a sediment management plan for the ponds at the Confluence Open Space, as the ponds will silt in over time. Pat replied that there is currently not such a management plan, but that it was a good idea as the ponds have silted in some over the last few years and are relatively shallow.
 - e. **Wayne Gallagher**- Happy to report he reapplied to the OSB for another term. He spent some time enjoying Coal Creek recently and took a neighbor there for the first time. Vicky mentioned she had also reapplied for another term.
- XIII. ADJOURN: Suzy Cress motioned to adjourn. Tom Isaacson seconded the motion. Motion carried; meeting adjourned at 7:10 P.M.

The next meeting will be on March 23 at 5:30 P.M via WebEx.

Victoria Samuel, Chair

Victoria Samuel

Lauren Morales, Recording Secretary

Lauren R. Morales