

City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Morrison Nature Center
May 17th, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Wayne Gallagher, Bob Hunchberger, Brad Stratton, Jason Amaya, Mark Christopher, Vicky Samuel, Bob Gemmill, Joy DeMots, Dennis Roy.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

STAFF PRESENT: Brian Green, Acting OSNR Division Manager; Lauren Morales, Management Assistant.

VISITORS PRESENT: CM Steve Sundberg, CM Juan Marcano, Joyce Bradney.

- I. CALL TO ORDER: Brad Stratton called the meeting to order at 5:35 PM.
- II. WELCOME: Brad Stratton welcomed everyone to the May OSB meeting and welcomed guests CM Marcano, CM Sundberg, and Joyce Bradney. Brad invited the OSB members to introduce themselves. Brad then invited the council members and Joyce to introduce themselves to the board. CM Sundberg represents Ward II and commented that he loves open space and the outdoors. He recently had surgery for an injury and is looking forward to getting back out to hiking and mountain biking. He thanked the OSB for the important work they do. CM Marcano represents Ward IV and thanked everyone for their passion and dedication to open space. He commented that he really loves Jewell Wetlands and thanked Joyce for her 36 years of care for the site. CM Marcano was at the wetlands at the beginning of COVID and met Joy then. Some fires were set at that time and the wetlands were damaged but have since healed. Joyce shared her connection to the Jewell Wetlands. 30 years ago, the neighborhood got together and asked that the area be saved. The EPA said that the wetlands was one of the top three natural sites in the Denver Metro Area. In celebration of Earth Day, kids from a nearby school dressed up as insects and the community protested to keep the wetlands from being developed. Joyce and others submitted around 1,200 signatures to save the site and the Trust for Public Land provided some funding and helped with negotiations. Brian Green added that the developers who wanted to build on the area already had a permit and were very far into the development approval process. The group Citizens for Jewell Wetlands advocated for open space and convinced the developer to sell the space to the city for a discounted rate. This was a significant accomplishment and now the wetlands are an amenity for the City of Aurora and its citizens. Bob Gemmill asked where the water in the wetlands comes from. Joyce responded that the pond is filled by an aquifer, but it is drying up. Westerly Creek feeds into the site as well. Brian added that the area is currently in a 20-year megadrought, and that the last couple of years have been especially bad. CM Marcano asked if the aquifer is Arapahoe aquifer. Brian responded that the water is exposed groundwater and is not connected to an established aquifer. The wetlands see lots of birds and migrating birds, as well as great horned owls and even nesting raptors. CM Sundberg mentioned that Utah Park is on top of a natural drainage basin and asked if it is the same for Jewell Wetlands. CM Marcano responded that it is, and that the flooding at Jewell Wetlands was very bad during the recent rains, with the parking lot underwater. He remarked that the site is doing its job well as a flood site. Joyce added that the city did major work on the site about 5 years back.
- III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Bob Gemmill moved to approve the agenda. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Bob Gemmill noted that he sent slight edits to staff for the April OSB minutes. Mark Christopher moved to approve the minutes from the April OSB meeting, with edits. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried.

- V. **MANAGEMENT REMARKS:** Brian Green shared that the city council recently approved the naming for the Richard Gary Black play area at Star K Ranch. The Aurora History Museum currently has a display featuring the great outdoors of Aurora, which will remain for a year. Some of the OSB members have featured displays. The display celebrates Aurora's vibrant outdoor opportunities and Brian encouraged everyone to go see it. Brian shared that last week he attended the Adams County Open Space annual breakfast with Wayne Gallagher and some PROS staff, including director Brooke Bell and some of the other managers. Aurora received a big check from Adams County for the 2022 share back in the amount of 1.7 million dollars. The funds come from citizens of Adams County and go towards Aurora open space. The open space team also received a few recent grants from Adams County. The grants will allow staff to connect the Highline Canal over I-70, which is the last gap in the Highline Canal Trail. The bridge over I-70 is already being constructed. CM Sundberg asked if that is the trail that goes to Aurora Reservoir. Brian responded that that is a different trail. CM Marcano mentioned that the Sister Cities organization is working with the Highline Canal Conservancy on a project to place a post listing all of Aurora's sister cities and their distance from the canal. Brian mentioned another grant for the Sand Creek Regional Greenway trail towards Stanley Marketplace. The grant will allow staff to add concrete to that portion of the Sand Creek trail, which is currently gravel. Byron Fanning, the current Director of Open Space for Adams County and former Business Services manager for PROS, was also in attendance at the breakfast.
- VI. **NEW BUSINESS:** No new business.
- VII. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** Brad shared that the OSB members have recently been discussing revising the OSB bylaws. He proposed to table this discussion until fall, when the meetings would go back to being indoors. The other OSB members agreed. Brad asked the OSB members if anyone had done the second quarter conservation easement monitoring yet. Bob H. and Joy shared that they had already been out to their assigned sites and mentioned some active beaver dams they had noticed at Coal Senac. Wayne had also been out for Q2 easement monitoring and Mark shared that he had walked his area. Brad explained the conservation easement monitoring program in greater detail to the guests. Bob H. mentioned the porcupine that was recently released at Coal Senac. Joyce asked where the porcupine had come from. Brian answered that it came from Aurora near Arapahoe Road. It had been shot by a pellet gun in the elbow. The porcupine was rehabilitated and released into a larger open area.
- VIII. **REPORTS:** Mark suggested that Brad should speak about the Outreach Education Presentation program to the meeting guests. Brad shared about the program and mentioned that the OSB had recently given the presentation at a Ward III council meeting for CM Medina. The OSB would love the opportunity to present at other ward meetings. CM Sundberg invited the board to present at the July Ward II meeting, which is held the third Thursday of the month and will be at Central Rec Center. CM Marcano invited the board to present at the July Ward IV meeting as well, which is held the second Thursday of the month and will be at Colorado Early Colleges. CM Marcano added that there are no city-owned sites in Ward IV that are large enough for the ward meetings but that he would love to expand. He will also be giving a presentation on the Congress of New Urbanism at the July Ward IV meeting. Dennis offered to help with the Ward II presentation. Bob H. and Wayne added that they would also be willing to help and would fully arrange the presentations for both ward meetings by July. Brian shared that the presentation could include a customized slide or two if there was anything specific the CMs would like shared. Bob H. added that the OSB members also customize the speaking points to be ward specific.
- IX. **CHAIR REMARKS:** Brad shared that the Earth Day cleanup did not happen due to a few inches of snow that morning. Some new photo posts were recently installed at Pronghorn Natural Area and a trail camera was installed by the creek where the beaver activity is. Brad took part in a monitoring visit yesterday when the footage was pulled. There were several hundred photos. Many were of

coyotes but there were also photos of deer, raccoons, a great blue heron in the creek itself, and lots of ducks and mallards. There were many night photos, one of which seems to be of the beaver. There is also a pair of nesting great-horned owls and two owlets at Pronghorn currently. The owlets are branching, and Brad saw them yesterday out on the branches. He mentioned that the owls have come to nest at Pronghorn for many years in a row. CM Marcano asked if there have been any burrowing owls out there. Vicky responded that she has seen some at the open lot at Quincy and Aurora Blvd, though not recently. Brad mentioned to Brian that the trails got washed out by the recent rain. They were able to step across, but there was a pool there that had some fish in it. Bob G. asked Brad if they saw any frogs. Brad said they looked but did not see any. Wayne commented that he heard many toads at Star K very recently. Bob G. added that there are currently lots at Aurora Reservoir as well. Brad reminded everyone that the June 21st OSB meeting will be at Pronghorn Natural Area. Part of the work at Pronghorn is monitoring the area twice a month during the summer and once per winter to document the effects of the building that went up nearby. He recommended long pants and good shoes for the site visit as the plan is to go off trail to see the beaver dam. Bob G. shared some about a water analysis project. In April, water testing was conducted at Senac Creek. They looked at three different areas including the beaver pond. Nitrogen and phosphorous were found, which are likely due to runoff from the housing developments upstream. The levels increased further upriver. Brian shared that the stormwater for those homes routes around the Aurora Reservoir. CM Marcano asked if fertilizer could be the cause. CM Sundberg added that cattails and goose droppings could also be contributing to factors. Bob G. asked Brian if the water should be tested again after the recent storm. Brian said yes, perhaps in June. Brad gave an update on the PCC research. Fendi has been ill recently, but the areas are plotted and ready for planting. Bob G. shared more information on the PCC research project with the meeting guests. Brad also shared that he recently did a display at the Chalk Lines and Vines event with Tom Isaacson. He will also be doing some chalk art for the Denver Chalk Art Festival on June 10th and 11th and invited folks to come out and say hi.

X. MEMBER COMMENTS & DISCUSSION:

- Joy- Had a blast checking out the Coal Senac site and witnessing the porcupine release and mentioned she is grateful for the nice weather lately.
- Wayne- Led a bird walk last Saturday and got a lot of new faces. It was the largest bird walk so far since the pandemic and was a good outing, if a little quiet. Today he took place in a bird count that spanned from Red-Tailed Hawk Park to Ponderosa Preserve. Three great horned owls and two red-tailed hawks were spotted nesting. The bird count is done twice per month at various locations.
- Bob G- Was on the east coast recently in Boston and Colorado was so green when flying back in- usually it is mostly brown. He has been seeing so much diversity lately and wildflowers are blossoming everywhere.
- Mark- Asked if the picnic area at Coal Creek ever gets used, and noted he saw a space shuttle installation there. Brian confirmed it does get used but not often. Mark said Vicky would like to gate the area. Vicky added that the picnic area seems to get weathered easily. Brian said that in the future staff might replace the picnic tables with tables that require less maintenance. Mark noted that the recent flooding washed away the beaver dam and that the beavers are not happy about it. Mark also asked if the company who is building an adult care center between Red-Tailed Hawk Park and E-470 had taken more land. Brian said they have not and are just using their own parcel but will be going under nearby parcels to run an electrical power line.
- Dennis- Had a great time at Pronghorn and enjoyed witnessing the power of water during the recent flooding. His kids are wrapping up the spring season for sports and keep asking what the “funny looking deer” (pronghorn) are when they are at Southeast Recreation Center.
- CM Marcano- Is very grateful for all the recent rain and noted that it is nice to see the wetlands so wet and lawns doing well. He is hoping for a strong monsoon season and the weather reminds him of how it was when he first moved to Colorado. He hopes that it will continue and that there will continue to be more moisture in the mountains as well. Bob G. asked what city efforts are in place to reduce water usage. CM Marcano responded that there is a City waterwise program that

has been in place for over a decade. The program offers up to a \$4,000 rebate for homeowners to convert their lawns to waterwise designs. The city helps with design and will reimburse up to \$4,000 for work and materials. CM Marcano noted that he would like to bump up the program by increasing the reimbursement and making it available as a grant upfront, rather than a rebate. He shared that 44% of the municipal water supply goes to lawns. Bob G. asked if the efforts are mostly focused on encouraging positive change. CM Marcano answered that it is currently light encouragement and needs to become stronger encouragement. Bob H. commented that the Aurora water department gave a recent presentation at a recent HOA meeting, and it was a packed house. The presentation was well-received and got people excited. Brian suggested mentioning that open space uses the least water when talking to others about water conservation. Open space staff use what they have and encourage native plants. Open space sites are sustainable, and some properties are watersheds. Increasing diversity will help matters as well.

- Bob H- Would like the city to continue to perform stellar work in the Highline Canal area. He recently rode his bike there and the Aurora side is great with many markers placed throughout. He commented that he would have been lost on the Denver side without GPS.
- CM Sundberg- Recently learned the importance of a good sump pump. His sump pump failed during the flooding and water was coming back into the house but a new one is on its way. At the Water Policy Committee meeting he attended that morning, staff shared that the reservoirs are currently at 55% total capacity, so the city will continue with stage 1 drought restrictions. He is looking forward to an event that will see over 1,000 kids at the AMC tomorrow to learn about water education and projects, which is a very important issue.
- Vicky- Spotted a Black-headed Grosbeak at Coal Creek which is proof of diversity in the area. She visited Coal Creek from east to west and the waterway is doing what it's supposed to do. The creek ran as high as it did in 2013 but flooding was better this time. Vicky thanked Brian and OSNR staff for the quick response they provided recently. Vicky has been watching some owls on the Highline Canal and noticed trees were marked with different colors. She wasn't sure what the colors meant so she contacted Brian who checked with Aurora water. The tree with the owls will remain as a habitat tree and water staff will return in July. Brian added that the tree is a large cottonwood tree with a large cavity that is housing two nesting great-horned owls. Staff likely would have noticed the nest at the time of removal. Vicky shared that the owls have fledged and are now out of the nest.
- Jason- Delaney farms went from dirt to a stream, and he is seeing lots of prairie dogs there. He works nearby and it is great to see people out enjoying the space.


XI. BULLET POINTS:

- The board welcomed council members Juan Marcano and Steve Sundberg to the board meeting, and wish to thank them for their participation and input during the meeting.
- Joyce Bradney discussed her involvement in the preservation of Jewell Wetlands, and her continued commitment to the area.
- The board scheduled an Open Space Outreach Presentation for the July meetings of both Ward II and Ward IV.
- The board had a tour and conducted a trash cleanup of Jewell Wetlands.

XII. ADJOURN: Wayne Gallagher moved to adjourn. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried and the business portion of the meeting adjourned at 6:38pm.

The next meeting will be on June 21st at 5:30 PM at Pronghorn Natural Area.


Brad Stratton, Chair


Lauren Morales, Recording Secretary