

City of Aurora
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY BOARD
Morrison Nature Center
October 18th, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Vicky Samuel, Joy DeMots, Dennis Roy, Wayne Gallagher, Brad Stratton, Mark Christopher

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bob Hunchberger, Bob Gemmill

STAFF PRESENT: Brian Green, Manager of Open Space & Natural Resources; Joy Thompson, Natural Resources Supervisor; Lauren Morales, Management Assistant

VISITORS PRESENT: David Bourne

- I. CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM.
- II. WELCOME: Brad Stratton welcomed everyone to the October OSB meeting. Brad congratulated Brian Green on being named the Manager of Open Space and Natural Resources. Brian shared that he was happy to accept the title of Manager after serving for 22 months as Acting Manager. Brian also shared that he had been named Acting Manager of the O&M and Forestry divisions as well, as John Wesolowski had accepted a new position and would be vacating the role. Brad welcomed guests Joy Thompson and David Bourne to the meeting and proposed moving the board's interview of David Bourne to the first item of business.
- III. ADOPTION OF AGENDA: Dennis Roy moved to approve the agenda, as amended. Mark Christopher seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Wayne Gallagher motioned to approve the August OSB minutes. Joy DeMots seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- V. NEW BUSINESS: Wayne Gallagher moved to end the public portion of the meeting and enter executive session to conduct board member interviews. Mark Christopher seconded the motion. Motion carried.

The OSB members interviewed candidate David Bourne for a current OSB vacancy. Dennis Roy moved to conclude the executive session and to reconvene the regular meeting. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Joy DeMots moved to recommend candidate David Bourne for appointment to the OSB. Dennis Roy seconded the motion. Motion carried. Brad explained the next steps of the approval process and welcomed David to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

Brad Stratton introduced Joy Thompson to provide an update on the Nature Play Area at Morrison Nature Center. Joy shared that the project is being funded by a grant through Adams County Open Space. Brian added that a ton of work has gone into the project and into getting the grant. Funding has now been expanded twice, which added more capital budget to support this effort. The design was going so well that it deserved that investment, and costs have also increased. There has been a lot of public input and open houses along the way. Joy shared that multiple partners wrote letters of support for the project. The overall theme of the Nature Play Area is to serve as a point of connection. Star K Ranch is a place of connection for wildlife, people, and trails, and is celebrating 20 years on Saturday. The vision for the Nature Play Area is that it will be welcoming to everyone and contain many inclusive aspects. The Play Area will be constructed within an acre of land and no trees will be

removed. Staff hope to plant more native trees and plants and not disturb the area too much. Features of the Nature Play Area include a beaver lodge, salamander island, dinosaur hill, an outdoor classroom, a sand pit, an insect garden, a building station, and a stream challenge. Joy encouraged the board members to check out the design panels around the room, detailing each of the Nature Play Area features. Brian added that the Nature Play Area will also be a place for programming and teaching. Some folks will not go out into the larger open space to explore, but the Nature Play Area can help get people more familiar with the outdoors. Many of the materials used in construction will be as sustainably sourced as possible. Wayne asked how the parking lot will be expanded. Brian answered that there is already a nearby parking lot, but that it is closed part of the year due to eagle's nests nearby. The Nature Play Area will draw more interest from the public. Mark asked if there will be a fence around the Nature Play Area. Brian and Joy responded that there will not be a fence, so parents will need to monitor their children as they play. Dennis asked if there has been any outreach in bringing in childcare centers and the like. Joy answered yes, all ages from preschools to PhD students took the time to examine the design and share feedback. David asked when construction will take place. Joy said staff is looking at the end of summer 2024 or early fall. Brian added that the project is maybe 10 months out currently. Joy shared that she would love to see a late 2024 opening date.

Brad led a review of the Action Plan. Brad shared print outs of Bob G's comments, which were sent via email. Many of the comments were about how the board can complete its goals, but today the OSB should focus on what to change. Joy DeMots suggested including links to referenced plans, such as different strategic plans. Mark asked if Ponderosa Preserve should be added under sites. Brad responded that the sites listed are just the areas in the Conservation Easement Monitoring, but that Ponderosa Preserve is not listed in point 3. Mark asked if Ponderosa Preserve is still available to view via invite only and Brad responded that it is. Dennis asked if point 2 includes suggestions on trail sites, and if it captures discussion around those future enhancements. Brain responded that he thinks it does. PROS staff are responsible for bringing suggestions to the OSB for input. Sometimes items have been brought to the OSB in past years, but such projects have not been implemented for many years. Mark pointed out a portion of the Action Plan that mentions support in identifying funding opportunities and grants and asked Wayne if the OSB has ever done that. Wayne responded that he has not seen it in his 15 years on the OSB. Lauren commented that she has seen staff ask the OSB to write letters of support when advocating for a grant. Brian added that that portion is there to include as a "what if", and that the word "identifying" could be changed to "supporting". Brad said he would make that change and bring a final version of the Action Plan for a vote at the next OSB meeting.

Brad shared that he, Wayne, and Brian had recently talked about where the OSB wants to go with outreach. One option is to continue with the current outreach and continue to find new audiences. A second option is to change the outreach presentation to focus on other topics, such as volunteer outreach. A third option is to do both- to reach out to HOAs and other audiences and to add to the current presentation. Vicky stated that the current outreach presentation can always be tailored to specific ward meetings. Brad agreed and said that while the slides remain the same, the words of each presentation change depending on the area. Mark commented that he agrees with doing both. While the ward meetings are great, they are getting similar audiences each time. Brad suggested forming a small subcommittee to discuss this and report back to the board as a whole and asked for volunteers. Mark, Brad, Vicky, and Joy volunteered to be on the subcommittee. Brad suggested that the subcommittee should arrange a time to discuss, and Mark suggested tabling the meeting until early January.

Brad shared that the board sponsored Holiday Habitat Cleanup has already been posted on the volunteer website as taking place at Centre Hills/DeLaney Farm. The post states that the cleanup will involve picking up golf balls. Brad suggested that the OSB should stand by what is published but can expand the scope of the cleanup if they choose. Brian mentioned that he shared the link for signup with a member of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

VI. MANAGEMENT REMARKS: Brian Green shared that the PROS Master Plan has been published.

The Master Plan took over a year and will serve as guidance for where the department is going for the next 10 or so years. The Master Plan saw over 18,000 contacts of public engagement from citizens regarding what they want. Brian encouraged the OSB members to review the plan. An executive summary is also available. The Master Plan has a strong equity focus and examines how the department can be equitable in providing services, how older neighborhoods don't always have the same resources or sites, and how the department can best serve a very diverse city. Brad mentioned that he went through the Master Plan very quickly and there is a lot about open space included throughout. He added that the picture of onions at the dog park made it in. Brian stated that the Master Plan is a very intentional and balanced document. Brian also shared that Brad and Wayne will be presenting at the PFQL (Parks, Foundations, and Quality of Life) policy committee meeting next week on what the board has done this year. Lauren will share the YouTube link to the OSB in case anyone would like to watch.

- VII. REPORTS: Brad reminded the OSB that the Conservation Easement Monitoring is currently in quarter four. With the holidays and snow coming up, it might be good to complete quarter four monitoring in October.

Brad shared that the OSB members presented at the Ward VI meeting. The presentation did not go as planned due to technical difficulties. The slideshow slides were set to auto present at a 3 second rate, which was discovered later by staff. Wayne shared that while the presentation did not go as hoped, a few folks stopped by to chat after. At the Ward V meeting, Brad asked Mark to reverse the auto forward. This meant Mark had to click back every three seconds. Mark commented that he thought the Ward V meeting went well. The police force was there, as well as city firefighters. There were more presenters than citizens and the citizens who did attend tend to be older and less diverse than the community as a whole. They tend to be folks who are concerned with the community. Brad added that the four-person subcommittee will discuss how to reach more diverse audiences. Some citizens are already very informed about open space, such as a woman who asked what the five eagles' nests were and named four of them. All in all, it is good to get out and connect with the council members. Vicky commented that the OSB may not want to give up continuing the council meeting appearances. Mark agreed that attending is helpful to help connect with the council members, instead of just sending the meeting bullet points out into the void. Vicky added that it's good to have positive news too. CM Coombs apologized for missing the last OSB meeting and mentioned that the OSB could also attend meetings and give a small blurb at the end of the meeting, even if they don't have a full presentation to share. That could be a good opportunity. Brad added that as the Nature Play Area progresses, the OSB could provide updates on the project at Ward meetings.

Joy DeMots shared that the OSB booth at the Fall Into Fun event went great. The booth had lots of visitors, including Mayor Coffman, who came up and thanked the OSB members for the work they do. Tons of trail maps were given out. Dennis shared that he was at the booth later in the afternoon. The event felt like a family environment. Many people new to the area commented that they didn't know some of the things that were shared. Every booth was given candy to hand out. Joy Thomspon asked if the OSB was tracking engagements. Brad replied they did not. Joy said that they should and could borrow a clicker. The OSB booth was next to the Naturalist booth. Joy offered to send a list of events from the Special Events team at the beginning of the year next year. If the OSB is interested in having a booth at any of the events, they can let staff know to arrange it. Brian shared that he has a thank you note for the OSB from the 7/20 Foundation.

- VIII. CHAIR REMARKS: Brad shared that the Morrison Nature Center 20th anniversary celebration will be held this Saturday, 10/21, from 10:30am to 3pm. Mayor Pro Tem Gardner will read a proclamation and the bull snake will be retired. The Trick or Treat Nature Trail event is also coming up soon, on the 28th and 29th from 10am-3pm. Joy shared details on the Trick or Treat Nature Trail event. It is a series of booths and candy and is very kid focused. This year the theme is gross stuff and kids will be able to test things at the "lab" at the end. Attendees are supposed to sign up for an available time slot ahead of

time and volunteers for the event are welcome. Brad shared that CM Medina is planning to attend the November OSB meeting. He stopped by the Fall Into Fun booth and said he is looking forward to attending in November.

IX. BULLET POINTS:

- Joy Thompson, Natural Resources Supervisor, presented the final design plans for the Nature Play Area at Morrison Nature Center.
- The Board interviewed and approved a candidate for the open position on the Open Space Advisory Board. The candidate will be forwarded to Council for approval.
- Brian Green, Open Space and Natural Resources Manager, discussed the PROS Master Plan, "Our Parks, Our Spaces".
- The Board discussed revisions to the Action Plan for 2024.
- Members of the Board reported on the outreach presentations at the Ward V and Ward VI meetings, and the Board's booth at the Fall into Fun Festival.

X. MEMBER COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION:

- Joy DeMots- Was recently at Aurora Reservoir and saw four pronghorn, three hawks, and numerous birds.
- Vicky- Asked where the volunteer vests are. Joy Thomspson volunteered to order the vests. Brad added that it would be nice to get some badges that say open space. Lauren Morales agreed to send the OSB roster to Joy so she could place the order.
- Wayne- Recently took some of the newer members up to the Ponderosa Preserve. He had conducted a bird checkout up there recently and one woman lost her sunglasses. The same sunglasses were coincidentally found during the most recent visit. It was a nice walk and a funny coincidence. Wayne and his wife will be doing a bird walk this coming weekend.
- David- Seeing the burrowing owls at PCC was fun. They left for another spot. Brad added that the restoration camera caught the burrowing owls. David shared that he and some others could use some new volunteer badges. Wayne added that the board originally had open space board badges, but that fell by the wayside.
- Mark- Wanted to thank the board leadership (Brad, Wayne, Vicky, etc) for all the work they have done to get the OSB to do outreach and projects this year. Mark stated that there is a monolith being built at Red-Tailed Hawk Park. The construction crew has now cut a trail into the open space there. Brian responded that it could be a trail connection. Mark added that the water looks bad, and Brian responded that the work is all permitted. Mark asked if the crew is done cutting into the Red-Tailed Hawk area. Brian was not sure. Mark asked if there will be a fence. Brian said there will be a fence and one point of connection to the trail. The utility work part of the construction project looks ugly but will be developed and landscaped. There are many projects like that near open space under the title of affordable housing. Each project seems to come to the PROS department at the last minute and already has funding, tax credits, timelines, and a lot of political pressure backing affordable housing projects.
- Dennis- Had a really good month of September with the elk rut. His 8.5-year-old son came out to shoot deer and was very excited for it. Dennis commented that it is an odd year and that his job works with shaping public policy. He encouraged the OSB members to look into their blue books and remember to vote. Brad added that Vicky and Dennis both have Instagram pages sharing their photography and that both are wonderful.

XI. ADJOURN: Mark Christopher moved to adjourn. Vicky Samuel seconded the motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:16pm.

The next meeting will be on November 15th at 5:30 PM at Plains Conservation Center.



Brad Stratton, Chair



Lauren Morales, Recording Secretary