



OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD (OLAB)

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 22, 2014

5:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Loveland Public Library • Gertrude Scott Room • 300 N Adams Av, Loveland CO

The mission of the Larimer County Open Lands Program is to preserve and protect significant open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, and develop parks and trails for present and future generations. These open lands provide opportunities for leisure, human renewal and protection of our natural and cultural resources.

Members Present
Peter Kast - At-large Carl Sorrentino - At-large Suzan Fritchel - At-large Nancy Wallace - Planning Commission Gerry Horak - City of Fort Collins John Phipps - Town of Estes Park Hugh McKean - City of Loveland Trudy Haines - At-large
Members Absent
Steve Vessey - At-Large Ladonna Lee - At-large Mary Banken - At-large Paul Alaback – Town of Berthoud

Staff Present
Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director Kerri Rollins, Open Lands Program Manager Meegan Flenniken, Resource Program Manager Sandy Werkmeister, Department Specialist Charlie Johnson, Senior Land Agent Travis Rollins, Open Space Operations Manager Charlie Gindler, Resource Specialist
Guests
David Weinstein, Trust for Public Land (TPL) John Stokes, Director, Fort Collins Natural Resources Dept Daylan Figgs, Senior Environmental Planner, Fort Collins Matt McCollum, USDA

1) CALL TO ORDER / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

John Phipps introduced Ward Nelson, who will take his place on the Open Lands Advisory Board beginning in June. Ward was elected to the Estes Park Town Board in April. Ward said he visited Estes for 30 some years and has lived there full time for six years now.

Liz O'Rourke introduced herself to the Board, saying she started with the department in March working with our conservation easements.

Kerri welcomed the Loveland Natural Areas Commission to the meeting.

2) PUBLIC COMMENT

3) AGENDA REVIEW

Hugh—since he is here, let's pay a small homage to Loveland's Parks & Recreation Director, Gary Havener, who is retiring in July after 35 years with Loveland.

4) REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Carl Sorrentino, 2nd by Suzan Fritchel to accept the meeting minutes from April 24, 2014 as written. Motion carried unanimously.

5) INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Our Lands, Our Future received another award – this one from the National Association of County Planners. This is the third award for this fabulous planning project!
- b. Our first public meeting kicking off our Master Plan update was held on April 30 at the Agave Room in Fort Collins. About 45 people attended. We are doing some focus groups as additional outreach to the agricultural community and young adults.

- c. Kerri reported that she had a work session with the Board of County Commissioners this morning to discuss the Trust for Public Land public opinion survey analysis regarding the future of the Help Preserve Open Spaces sales tax. Thank you to Nancy Wallace for attending. The OLAB will see the same presentation later in the meeting.
- d. Rob Burdine, manager of the Loveland Natural Areas Program has resigned his position.
- e. The executive director of Legacy Land Trust, Jodi Bikkel, resigned her position end of March.
- f. Thanks to a Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment grant, a contractor is onsite beginning Phase 1 of tire removal at Roberts Ranch. This was a partnership between Larimer County Health & Environment, Solid Waste and Natural Resources.
- g. Our Big Thompson River Conservation & Recreation planning project—that we received a GOCO for to do a study of recreation in the Big Thompson canyon--is awaiting posting for bids. We hope to have it kicked off in June.
- h. Land Agent I position application deadline was extended until May 19. We only had 19 applicants so we extended the search to some state and national list serves.
- i. Kerri announced that the department’s annual report is out. Copies are available on the conference table.
- j. There were no questions about the Open Space Operations or the sales tax reports.

6) DISCUSSION & UPDATES

- a. Kerri introduced David Weinstein from the Trust for Public Lands (TPL), who has been working with us looking to the future of our sales tax. David showed a presentation reviewing the public opinion survey results. After some discussion, he distributed a handout summarizing the findings to the Board. He closed by saying that TPL is happy with the numbers for a renewal of the program and recommend moving forward in that direction.

Tax performance and cost projections scenario review - Kerri talked through where we are on the timeline, which is to select an option (for the ballot) that works for everyone. From the information gathered , the Board’s sales tax committee has narrowed it down to two recommendations. After discussion and potentially more information gathering, we hope to bring it back to the Board in June for a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) to move forward. In early July, we will take ballot language to the BCC for resolution to refer it to the November ballot.

Kerri reviewed some information from earlier presentations regarding projections, and went over the two latest scenarios. In scenario 1, Larimer County portion stays at 42%-45% (keep cities whole with current formula). Capital Improvements stay in the “acquisition” split. In scenario 2, the citizen committee working on this wanted to make sure that the 35% for acquisition was *only* for acquisition. With all capital improvements to a new property coming out of a long-term management fund, changing the splits became necessary Fort Collins and Loveland would see an annual decrease in sales tax revenue of \$528,000 and \$264,000 respectfully. So far, the cities are supporting the change, as they understand the reasoning behind it. Hugh McKean pushed back on behalf of the City of Loveland, stating that a 12.5% hit to their program is substantial.

Trudy Haines is disconcerted with acquisition dropping from 70 to 35% with population growth being what it is. She asked whether the committee talked of keeping acquisition higher, to purchase a certain percent of land to open later with the help of partners. Nancy explained that whether you develop it or not, there is a management cost attached to any land that will alter the overall planning for the life of the tax. There has to be a process to figure out how much acquisition makes sense. Based on the projections, Kerri has figured out that over the life of the tax it will cost 50% of the incoming tax to manage the lands we own or will own, and the rest of the numbers have to fall in from there.

Hugh McKean argued for Scenario 1, which keeps more money in land management for longer sustainability of the program. He further asked why we are on the timeline we are, stating that July is no where close to when the Commissioners need to settle on *their* ballot issues. Response was that the Commissioners need their ballot issues in August, which makes July a very reasonable deadline. The Board also discussed which entities might

buy property where (in the future), whether there should be requirements for partnerships, what scenarios are most palatable to the citizens, etc.

Board Chair, Peter Kast, called for a straw poll and any comment from each board member. John Phipps: Scenario 1, Nancy Wallace: Scenario 2, Suzan Fritchel: Scenario 2, Trudy Haines: Scenario 2, Carl Sorrentino: Scenario 2, Hugh McKean: Scenario 1, Gerry Horak, Scenario 2 makes the most sense, but what happens if things work out better than expected and the County has extra money, Peter Kast: Scenario 2.

Nancy Wallace brought up bonding, asking whether anyone has a strong desire for it to be on the ballot. Polling showed that the "bonding language" is read and perceived as a tax increase by some people, even though it is not. David Weinstein answered Trudy that although we can bond "per project" it is typically more difficult to get the whole County to vote yes on one project. It is better to have the authority to do it if needed. Bonding is used for acquisition only and Nancy pointed out that it may be needed more if GOCO funds are less likely. Peter Kast, Trudy Haines and other members like the idea of having the tool available to us. It is what allowed us to buy some of the favorite properties we have today. Discussion on this was tabled for now.

- b. John Stokes gave a presentation on the latest draft of the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department Master Plan. The department has conserved 42,000 acres and actively manages 35,000 acres (much being Soapstone.) There are 43 Natural Areas (39 currently open to the public) and 105 miles of trail. Some questions that will be addressed in this new master plan are land conservation priorities, limited hunting, camping, local food production involvement, level of historic preservation, their role in Poudre River conservation and restoration.

John ended his presentation by stating that the County has been excellent to work with, and they really appreciate the role the county plays in their opportunities. It is a great partnership and he expects that doing projects together will continue. When asked, he could not think of a time Larimer County did not partner with them. Gary Buffington said this was true with Loveland as well, which should greatly ease concerns about shifting the tax percentages.

- c. Meegan Flenniken said there has been discussion between Larimer County, the City of Fort Collins, USDA and Colorado State University for a couple years about the possibility of grazing bison, impregnated with genetically-pure bison of Yellowstone genetics, mostly on Soapstone and a portion of Red Mountain. The Board received a Pros/Cons sheet on the subject. Daylan Figgs with the Natural Areas of the City of Fort Collins gave a presentation on the subject answering, "Why Yellowstone bison?"
 - Largest herd of "pure" bison. Quite rare.
 - Genetics desired but difficult to obtain
 - Opportunity to use assisted reproduction to move genetics outside of Yellowstone without passing on disease

The City of Fort Collins identified the pasture on the southern end of Soapstone for bison grazing from the beginning. The location was chosen because of water access. The Red Mountain component adds progressively different sized pastures. If the County chose to participate, the project could move along faster with our help because the pasture could increase by rerouting fence. Fencing is 30% more expensive for bison, and will impact this project. Meegan went over the Pros/Cons sheet, for Larimer County Natural Resources, and asked for any questions or concerns, as there is an RFP for the fencing now so the project could begin moving forward within weeks.

Travis Rollins shared information about the conversation that he and Charlie Gindler had with Eldon Ackerman, who currently has a lease to graze on the Red Mountain property. Eldon's top concerns. 1) Although we are talking about a small portion of Red Mountain, it is utilized when the draw is running water, as has been the case the last few years. 2) He said the actual acres for this project are not the biggest concern, but rather the precedent that is being set. If we take property for this purpose, what other property will we take from the area for other purposes?

Charlie added that we are trying to promote that we are providing for agricultural use, so perhaps there is a public relations issue and Travis mentioned that while the City of Fort Collins has been planning for bison from the beginning, in their easements and master plan documents, Larimer County has not.

Meegan responded that if Eldon is most uncomfortable about his cut of animal units' month (AUMs) (how much forage an animal will eat in a month, determining the charge and carrying capacity of a property); we can possibly use some different areas until the current lease with Eldon is up. Gary Buffington asked if the Board had any philosophical questions or concerns about partnering on the project. Trudy clarified that while the project could go forward without Red Mountain, which it could, it is financially easier (for fencing purposes) if the partnership is created from the beginning.

d. Devil's Backbone Open Space Management Plan and budget information

Meegan went over the budget sheet to complete the Devil's Backbone Management Plan. There were no questions.

7) OTHER BUSINESS

Kerri informed the Board to forget the doodle poll looking for an additional June meeting date. She will set aside plenty of time in the regular June meeting to discuss the sales tax.

8) ADJOURN – Meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM