



OPEN LANDS ADVISORY BOARD (OLAB)

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 26, 2015

5:00- 8:00 PM

Civic Center Municipal Bldg • Council Chambers • 500 E 3rd St., 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	
Carl Sorrentino	At-large
Ladonna Lee	At-large
Mary Banken	At-large
Peter Kast	At-large
Suzan Fritchel	At-large
Trudy Haines	At-large
Hugh McKean	City of Loveland
Nancy Wallace	Planning Commission
Ward Nelson	Town of Estes Park

Staff Present
Gary Buffington, Natural Resources Director
Kerri Rollins, Open Lands Program Manager
Charlie Johnson, Senior Land Agent
Alex Castina, Land Agent
Meegan Flenniken, Resource Program Manager
Sandy Werkmeister, Department Specialist
Chris Fleming, Open Space Operations Manager
Zac Wiebe, Fund Dev & Spec Proj Specialist
Lori Smith, Senior Accountant

Members Absent	
Paul Alaback	Town of Berthoud
Gerry Horak	City of Fort Collins

1. CALL TO ORDER / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS - Meeting was called to order by Peter Kast.
2. PUBLIC COMMENT - No public comment
3. AGENDA REVIEW - No changes
4. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF LAST MEETING MINUTES

Motion by Carl Sorrentino and second by Trudy Haines to approve the February 26, 2015 meeting minutes as submitted in this month's packet. Motion carried unanimously.
5. INFORMATION & ANNOUNCEMENTS
 - a. The Green conservation easement closed in late February, protecting an additional 677 acres in the Laramie Foothills Mountains to Plains corridor – Larimer County contributed \$75,000 to the conservation easement. Tim Meyer is working on a tour for the Board in June.
 - b. The Meininger Trail Easement, approved last month, closed March 18. That portion of the Poudre River Trail construction is still scheduled for completion in June.
 - c. The Grant Access Easement at Lions Park Open Space closed March 3. The restoration project planned for the banks of the Poudre River has started and will carry on after spring runoff. This was the first closing for Alex since coming to work for the County. Congrats Alex!
 - d. Several staff and Board members attended portions of the Colorado Coalition of Land Trusts conference March 16-18. Charlie thought it was excellent, and especially interesting to hear the perspective of the appraisers who are having so much scrutiny from the State. This will no doubt affect cost. Mary Banken agreed, stating that Colorado is experiencing growing pains in several areas around land acquisition and tax credits. Fees have gone up several hundred percent. Mary has requested a presentation to the Board on tax credits. Kerri added that senate bill 206 proposes to increase the cap of the transactions for land donations to help reduce large acreage landowners having to conserve their property in multiple phases.

- e. The COSA Conference will be in Snow Mass September 14-16, 2015. OLAB members are invited and encouraged to attend.
- f. Since last month, we have learned that there is a state statute that requires the Planning Commission to adopt the Open Lands Master Plan. We will attend a work session with the Commissioners in April for them to make a recommendation to the Planning Commission, who we hope will adopt it in May.
- g. Report from the Open Space Operations Manager. No questions. Gary mentioned that we have a new director (Todd Juergens) at Road and Bridge and as a result, we are working closer with them for gravel and road grading at Hermit Park and other locations.
- h. Sales Tax Report from prior month - Kerri will give a report on the sales tax performance for the year next month, since Lori is here tonight to discuss cash flow numbers.

7. DISCUSSION & UPDATES (1st item)

- a. Zac reminded the Board that representatives from Colorado Dept of Transportation (CDOT), Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the Forest Service, Larimer County Natural Resources, City of Loveland and members from the Big Thompson Restoration Coalition, are conducting the Big Thompson Canyon Recreation and Conservation study. The scope of the study is the western edge of Loveland to the Olympus dam in Estes Park. Zac presented the major themes of feedback from the public meeting and the number of occurrences any one item was requested. His report did not capture notes, which he said were full of requests for trails, restrooms and bicycling is an activity that continues to rise to the forefront for the canyon. CDOT, with federal funding, will be building the road to today’s safety standards (includes a 6’ paved shoulder) where it is feasible, which is almost everywhere except the Narrows. They do not have funding to bring unaffected sections up to the 6’ standard. Yet to be determined is the management of the shoulder. Will it be swept to prevent road bike accidents? Will cars be allowed or prohibited to park on the shoulder? The presentation and summary sheet will be included with permanent meeting record.
 What’s next for the group? – honing in on the properties and determining agency roles within the canyon. The group is beginning to draft a plan and categorizing the properties. Trudy asked if FEMA would buy property to prevent it from being rebuilt (just to be flooded again.) Zac responded that they are doing that right now. It is called Hazard Mitigation and we have applied to acquire some of those parcels to return them to natural condition and manage them in perpetuity, without any future help from FEMA after the inevitable next flood event in the canyon. Landowners do not have to sell to FEMA, and may not since FEMA is offering post flood values. Gary said there are about 90 properties in this category. Kerri told the Board we would work on a field trip for the Board and the Loveland Commission for some of these properties in May. In response to Nancy, Zac said that at first review they tried not to look at practicality, such as access routes. They stuck with resource, restoration and recreational values. Kerri added it is a visionary plan, so what is true today may not be true in 10 years.

PRESENTATIONS

Kerri reported that ever since the joint tour with the Agriculture Advisory Board of the Boulder County Agriculture Program, there has been many discussions about the concept of buy and dry of irrigated agricultural properties in Larimer County. While agriculture land has and continues to be a priority in our master plans, 95% of the agricultural land we have purchased has been ranch land, not irrigated farmland. The demand for conserving irrigated farmland is swelling. Kerri has scheduled this presentation tonight for educational purposes to prepare us for future property opportunities. She introduced George Wallace, Nancy’s husband, retired professor from CSU, member of the Agriculture Advisory Board and the Poudre Sharing Group.

- a. George presented **Alternatives to the “buying and drying” of irrigated agriculture land in Larimer County: Future partnerships**. Some highlights:
 - Irrigated agriculture in Larimer County – a rich history
 - Benefits Provided by irrigated ag
 - The unprecedented threats to ag land and water: ag to urban transfers (“buy and dry”). Examples were provided.

- Colorado Legislature has passed several laws to facilitate water sharing and the Governor and Basin Roundtables want a State Water Plan that includes Alternative Transfer Methods or Mechanism (ATMs) and water sharing
- “Buy and Dry” is seen as unsustainable: (by the CWCB, Inter-basin Compact Committee, Basin Roundtables, Western Governors Assn., county advisory boards & many other groups.
- Looking for alternative transfer mechanisms: Poudre Basin Water Sharing Working Group Formed in 2013
- Types of Water Sharing/Trading Being Discussed by the Working Group*
 - Water Swaps – trading multiple-use water (CBT) owned by irrigators for agricultural water owned by a utility
 - Leases Agreements – ag water shares used for urban water supply in response to a crisis
 - Interruptible Supply Agreements – longer term contracts to help utilities meet drought firming and recovery, emergencies
 - Buy and Supply – the most certainty for participants and the ATM with widespread support
 - Open space programs, water utilities, others, buy, protect, return (lease or re-sale) farms and water to ag producers with conditions for water sharing – a concept well received by the working group – with some local examples
- The need for new partnerships

Hugh asked George to clarify CBT water law. George explained that CBT is the most attractive to municipalities because there is no downstream return flow obligation and it is already decreed for multiple uses, so municipalities can take it and use it without any water court or other proceedings. The Board supported the Buy and Supply Concept, discussing water resource options in depth and the value of keeping the Front Range in balance by not eliminating any one sector we enjoy and support today.

The presentation will be included with permanent meeting record.

b. Horsetooth District Headquarters and Maintenance Facility

Mark Caughlan, District Manager for Horsetooth Reservoir presented the conceptual plans for new Horsetooth headquarters and maintenance facilities. These are the final two projects of the 10-year master plan, having implemented all of the improvements for visitors first. Horsetooth is the third busiest reservoir in Colorado. Combined with Horsetooth Mountain and the Blue Sky Trail it is one the busiest recreation complexes in the State, without a “front door” or adequate facilities for staff. The new facilities will house Horsetooth Reservoir rangers, maintenance crews for Horsetooth Mountain and open lands north and the Trails Crew who work on all properties. The timeline is to start construction November this year, and complete the projects in phases over 2 years. The office building will be completed first, hopefully in 2016. The building was scaled back a bit from original plans to keep the footprint smaller due to the expense of moving rock. The crew at Fossil Creek is more likely to be incorporated into a centralized office location for Open Lands and Accounting. The presentation/plans will be included with permanent meeting record.

7. DISCUSSION & UPDATES (2nd item)

a. Acquisition & Development Financial Summary Sheet

Kerri reminded the board that last month Jeffrey sent them a budget information sheet for the Poudre River Trail Construction, Gateway Trailhead to Stone Fly Drive section. Actual costs came in higher than the budgeted amount and the Board needs to take action if they will approve.

8. ACTION ITEMS

a. Poudre River Trail Development budget item

Motion by Carl Sorrentino that we approve the additional \$38,000 to complete the Gateway Trailhead to Stone Fly Drive section of the Poudre River Trail. Second by Suzan Fritchel. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Final Review Hermit Park Conservation Easement Amendment

Alex Castino highlighted the three main purposes of the ‘amended and restated conservation easement’ with Estes Valley Land Trust (EVLТ). She also explained that Larimer County will have some review power if EVLT ever chooses to transfer the easement. Gary added that the Board and staff will continue to have oversight of the development zone.

Nancy suggested that having a representative from EVLT on OLAB all the time seems wise. Mary Banken suggested Legacy Land Trust also. Kerri reminded all that we can suggest members, but the final composition of the Open Lands Advisory Board is up to the Board of County Commissioners.

As the Director of EVLT, Mary Banken recused herself. Motion by Nancy Wallace to recommend approval of the amended and restated conservation easement for Hermit Park Open Space. Second by Ward Nelson. Motion carried unanimously.

Pursuant to C.R.S. 24-6-402 (4)(a) for discussion regarding the purchase, acquisition, lease, transfer, or sale of any real, personal, or other property interest, *motion by Nancy Wallace and second by Ward Nelson to move into Executive Session. Motion carried unanimously. (No minutes)*

9. CALL BACK TO ORDER - The board left Executive Session to finish the public portion of the meeting.

a. Horsetooth District Headquarters and Maintenance Facility budget item

Gary Buffington presented a review of sales tax revenues and expenditures as of March 23, 2015, and estimates through the end of 2016. Next, he presented the 2014-2018 Natural Resources Capital Improvement Plan. He wants the sales tax to be a part of the funding source for the Horsetooth shop and offices.

Nancy Wallace does not think we should spend open space dollars on the Horsetooth building, which is not dedicated to open spaces. Gary showed that looking at the split of staff, there are five regular staff and 6-8 seasonals dedicated to Horsetooth Reservoir. Open Space folks are four regular staff (two maintenance and two trails construction) and 4-5 seasonal trail crew. He reminded the Board that the department is so intermingled now. It is not as it was 10 years ago.

Nancy thought there has been a priority placeholder for years to have a building that houses open space staff, but all of sudden a building comes up for a Horsetooth Headquarters for 3 million without any notice until today. Gary responded that he is not sure the placeholder was ever just for open space. The building for Horsetooth has been on their master plan since 2007. Further, there is not really an open space dedicated building in the future for this department. The accounting folks will be there as well and they are split many different ways between parks and open space funds. He restated that there is not any parks and open lands anymore. It is the Department of Natural Resources.

Trudy said that even with people intermingled; she thinks it is fair to split by staffing percentages. Gary responded we do that on the operational piece. But it becomes more difficult with capital improvements. At the Horsetooth facility, the split of staff between parks and open space funding is about 60/40 while actual open space funding of the project is to be 30%. Gary maintains that the building will have information about the entire department. It will be a Natural Resources building in the Horsetooth District.

Nancy requested that it not be called Horsetooth Headquarters (HQ), but to name it something that encompasses more than the reservoir. She suggests that we need to be careful to avoid sole focus on the reservoir if we are using open space dollars to build it. Several agreed that using something other than just Horsetooth in the name should be implemented. Some ideas were “The Natural Resource Center at Horsetooth,” “Information Center at Horsetooth” or using Horsetooth Rock as a neutral focal point. Gary confirmed that it will be a location to purchase access to any Larimer County park/open space.

Motion by Ward Nelson that we allocate 1.3 million to the Horsetooth facilities. Second by Suzan Fritchel. Motion carried unanimously.

10. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.