



**TOPS Working Committee Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 6, 2021**

Members Present: Blaze Panariso, Bob Falcone, Bob Shafer, Nancy Hobbs, Stephanie Surch, Paula Krantz, Wendy Thomas, Ingrid Richter, Hank Scarangella

Members Absent:

Parks Board Liaisons Present: Carol Beckman, Greg Thorton

Parks Board Liaisons Absent: Abby Simpson

Staff Present: Anna White, Melody Horbach, Kurt Schroeder, Britt Haley, Gillian Rossi, David Deitemeyer, Karen Palus, Emily Duncan

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TOPS Working Committee Chair Bob Falcone brought the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

Agenda Preview

Committee Chair Bob Falcone announced the agenda for the meeting.

Announcements

Gillian Rossi, TOPS Parks Ranger Supervisor, presented a flyer to show all of the events during hot spot week for the Leave No Trace program. The event is from October 14-17. There will be staff and trainers who will be coming out to do a wrap-up after the hot spot week. The staff and trainers will go on site visits with Gillian and her team to create an action plan on how to increase stewardship in Colorado Springs.

Kurt Schroeder, Parks Maintenance and Operations Manager, announced he will be having a meeting with the deputy chief of police on 10/6/21 to discuss specifics on how to approach graffiti and vandalism aggressively. There has been an increase in vandalism during COVID and we are unsure of the cause.

Approval of Minutes – September 1, 2021

Motion: To approve the minutes of the September 1, 2021 TOPS Working Committee meeting.
1st– Nancy Hobbs, 2nd Blaze Panariso – Approved, Unanimously.

Citizen Discussion

Cory Sutela, Executive Director of Medicine Wheel Trail Advocates, announced the board of Medicine Wheel voted unanimously to support the TOPS 2C initiative. Additionally, he stated if

2C passes and there is more money available on the administrative side, they will pursue a Jacob's study document for open space.

Susan Davies, Executive Director of Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC), stated the ballot will be sent out on Monday or Tuesday of the week of 10/4/21, so everyone will need to work together to help 2C pass. The board of directors last week voted unanimously to support 2C and are seriously supporting 1A and 2D as well. 1A is 2C county labor retention items of excess which will allot 2 million dollars for county parks and open spaces. 2D will provide wildfire mitigation in more critical areas which will have a direct impact on the parks. Furthermore, she clarified if 2C passes, it will cost taxes roughly an additional \$1.17 or more per month per household.

Action Items

Election of a TOPS Working Committee Chair and Vice-Chair

Nomination of Elect Bob Falcone for Committee Chair

1st – Blaze Panariso, 2nd – Paula Krantz, Approved, Unanimously

Nomination of Nancy Hobbs for Vice Chair

1st – Paula Krantz, 2nd – Blaze Panariso, Approved, Unanimously

Fishers Canyon Acquisition

Britt Haley, TOPS Program Manager, and David Deitemeyer, Senior Landscape Architect, presented the TOPS Working Committee with a proposal on the Fishers Canyon Acquisition. This presentation included an overview of the 2014 Park System Master Plan Guidance; Fishers Canyon Property Acquisition, Chamberlain Trail Master Plan; Trail and Connection Opportunities; Fishers Canyon Property; Transaction Overview; Fishers Canyon Property Acquisition Phasing Map; Funding Available; Tentative Timeline; Recommendation and Proposed Motion; and finally, a slide for any questions that may have come up during the presentation.

Committee member Nancy Hobbs inquired if there will be any trailheads. David Deitemeyer responded as it's too early to say for sure if there will be any trailheads. Committee member Blaze Panariso stated with The Conservation Fund Partnership and purchase, he assumes that is some contractual obligation. Britt Haley, TOPS Program Manager, stated yes there is a legal document so the purchase price won't change and will stay the same in Spring 2022. Committee Chair Bob Falcone asked if the city doesn't approve the purchase, will The Conservation Fund no longer go through with the purchase. Britt Haley responded that The Conservation Fund is already under contract because there were others interested in the property. Therefore, The Conservation Fund worked very hard on obtaining the property with November 18 as the closing date. If there is no approval, then The Conservation Fund would have to either terminate the contract or for another

buyer. Parks Board Liaison Carol Beckman asked what kind of feedback has been received with the city budget. Britt Haley stated the city has been extremely supportive and is very excited about the topography and the views. The new council members are very excited about their first opportunity to be involved in the TOPS property.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone inquired if we are looking for grants and if they will be used for purchase. David Deitemeyer responded with the support of Emily Duncan, Trails Development Coordinator, they were able to seek \$1.2 million for acquisition through a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant request. They will hear back in December if they were selected, and if approved, reimbursement will occur a year from now.

Committee member Stephanie Surch asked what the timeline for the master plan is and if they have to wait until phase 2 is purchased. David Deitemeyer responded the entire acquisition will need to be purchased first, and the tentative plan is to move forward with the Chamberlain Trail. Then, the next steps will be the master plan for the overall property with a one-to-three-year timeline. Furthermore, committee member Stephanie Surch asked when will the public be able to use this trail. David responded the part of the government grant includes giving access to the public within the one-to-three-year window.

Motion: To recommend the acquisition of up to 343 acres of property known as the Fisher Canyon property in two phases from The Conservation Fund and specifically to approve the Phase I acquisition of 258 acres at a cost of \$1,475,000 which includes the cost of the appraisal, land survey, phase I environmental report, real estate transaction costs and professional services fee with revenues from the TOPS Open Space Category.

1st–Nancy Hobbs , 2nd– Stephanie Surch, Approved, Unanimously

[Link to PowerPoint](#)

Citizen Discussion

Susan Davies, Executive Director of Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC), thanked David Deitemeyer and Britt Haley for their tenacity and passion. She was blown away from previous presentations and wasn't sure if the acquisition would happen. She will remember this moment for the rest of her life because this acquisition is an honor to have submitted or nominated.

John Marvin, Director of Spires HOA, stated the residents he has spoken to in general on the HOA board are in support of the purchase of open space. They are all in agreement this is a much better use than trying to put in a subdivision as the level of boulders and blasting that would require is not something they want. Some residents have concerns particularly with the master plan and won't be thrilled with the trailhead. There are a lot of homes that would be close to the acquisition area, so they want to make sure there is some adequate buffer behind their rear yards to ensure that hikers or people who walk their dogs will have some distance.

Mike Scott, citizen, stated that this acquisition is a major huge and all of the work put into it is a reflection on the TOPS Working Committee. He thinks it's really timely to show how important the TOPS Program is, it is worthy of a specialized tax for these things like this procurement to happen. He added he believes this is a vision that Colorado Springs has and wants to move forward.

Committee Chair Bob Falcone stated while he would love to see a connection from the top of the mountain because the Dixon Trail does not allow bikes on the trail, it would be challenging to do so, considering it is the only trail available in the area. He inquired how much the master plan would cost. David Deitemeyer, Senior Landscape Architect, said they have not specifically looked at this, but the previous process was around \$150,000 including public process, landscaping, and other requirements related to the contract.

Committee member Wendy Thomas stated she would love if everyone could think about ways to integrate the master plan sooner because it takes so much longer than anticipated. In a dream world, it would be great if they could start on master plans so much sooner than having to wait to acquire the entire property. Committee member Stephanie Surch agreed and mentioned she would appreciate it if citizens could capture the enthusiasm the TOPS Working Committee feels much sooner, and it would behoove everyone moving the process along sooner.

Britt Haley, TOPS Program Manager, stated the staff applied to Great Outdoors Colorado not only for grants but for master planning too, but were not chosen. Additionally, she mentioned this is all dependent on staffing to manage that master plan process, to put out an RFP, and be at all of the meetings. She said there needs to be enough staffing that is qualified to do that to speed up the process and to fulfill all of the hours necessary.

Committee member Stephanie Surch inquired when there is a grant written if it includes additional staff. Britt Haley, TOPS Program Manager, stated typically the opportunity to fund additional staffing has not occurred and there has been an effort to pursue those opportunities while some grants allow for it to happen, and others do not. Committee Chair Bob Falcone mentioned reserving some funding for additional staffing in the future would be nice in hopes to speed up that process. Britt Haley said every time there is a master plan process, she is looking for budget requests for budget implementation. Therefore, if in 2023 there is a budget implementation to flow in the right direction, there will be access to funds available for additional staffing.

Committee member Wendy Thomas stated it may be beneficial to put out one RFP so there can be a professional firm on a retainer where there are conditions to break the agreement if they are not delivering the identified milestones. Furthermore, she said it may be good to look into a private sector contract who is not a full-time employee that can be more agile to step in and step out as needed.

Committee member Nancy Hobbs asked what the viability of doing that leg work is and if a friend's group can help with the money. Citizen Susan Davies, Executive Director of Trails and Open Space Coalition (TOSC), mentioned there is a low probability to create a friends group as people are not excited until they see the park. Once there is something to do- whether a contract, initial trash pickup, etc. there will be a slow pick up on creating a friends group.

Committee member Blaze Panariso mentioned while he understands wanting to bring the excitement to the table, he believes it would be wise to think about using Corral Bluffs as an example. He wants to take the excitement and want the public to love places such as Fishers Canyon but cannot put the cart before the horse. Britt Haley, TOPS Program Manager, added all of the parks' implementation depends on staff availability.

Motion to adjourn

1st – Nancy Hobbs, 2nd – Blaze Panariso, Approved, Unanimously at 9:16 A.M.